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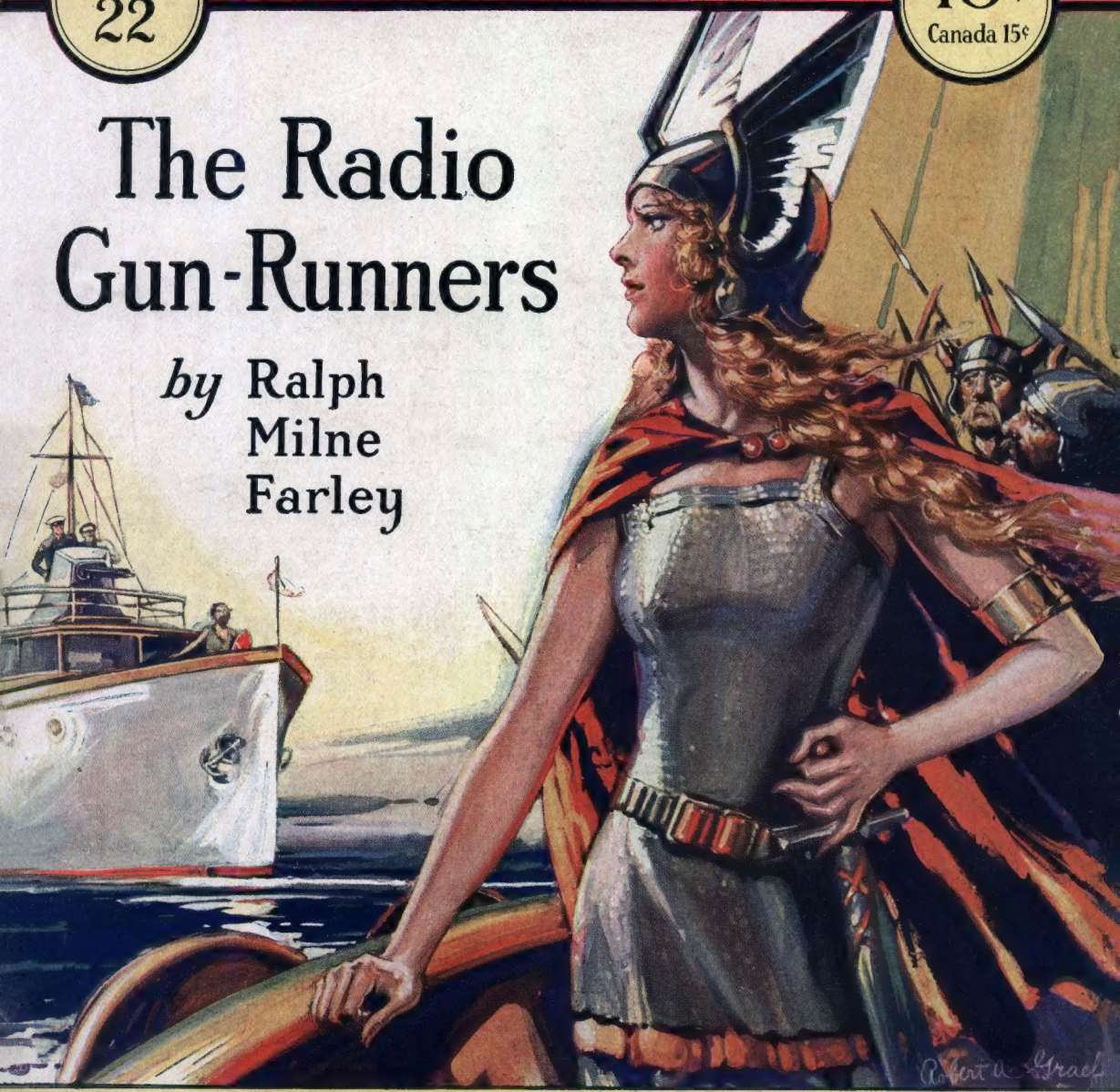
The Radio Gun-Runners

by Ralph Milne Farley



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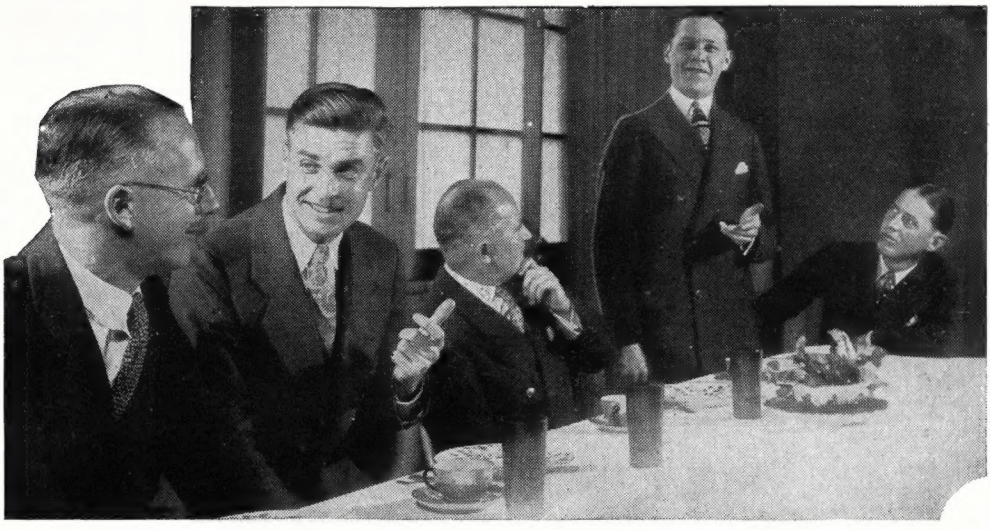

"They Snickered When I Got Up To Speak"

—But from the First Word, I Held Them Spellbound

THE banquet hall was crowded. Suddenly I heard the chairman's voice say—"We will now have a few words from Mr. Byron Munn." It came like a flash of lightning! He was unexpectedly calling on *me* for a speech!

As I started to get up, I heard a titter run around the table.

"Watch him make a fool of himself," I overheard some one whisper. "He's so bashful he's afraid of his own voice."

I knew they were expecting me to make myself ridiculous, but I only grinned inside.

I stood squarely on my two feet and started in!

"But When I Commenced to Speak"—

Almost from the first word, the smiles of doubt and derision faded from their faces. They were incredulous—amazed! Instantly the atmosphere became so tense that you could have heard a pin drop! No snickers nor sneers *now!* My voice, clear as a bell—strong, forceful, unfaltering—rang out through the banquet hall as I hammered home each point of my message with telling strokes! I let myself go—soaring to a smashing finale that almost brought them to their feet!

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Was Once a "Human Clam"

After it was all over, Jack Hartray fell into step beside me as I left the hall. "Gee, that was a great speech!" he said enthusiastically. "You certainly raised yourself about 100% in the eyes of every person in that place tonight. . . . And yet they used to call you 'a human clam'—and the quietest man in the office!"

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* * *

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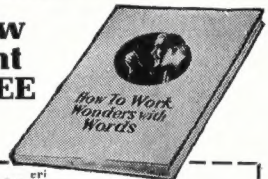

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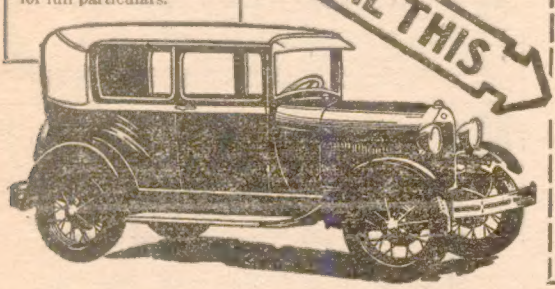

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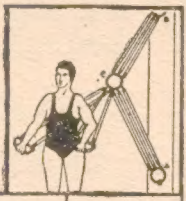

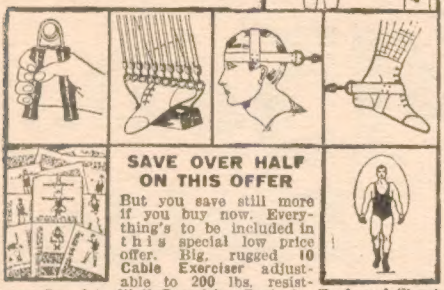

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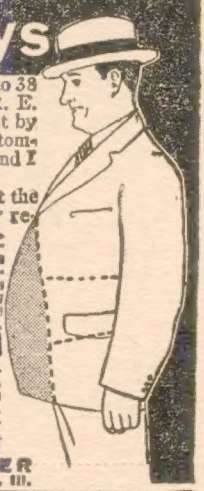

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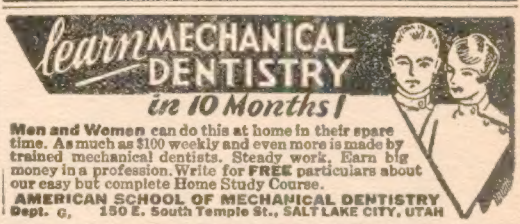

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ARGOSY

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VOLUME 210 SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1930 NUMBER 3

The hijackers looked like city gangsters to him

The Radio Gun-Runners

Tom Jones had his yacht trip in Canadian waters all planned—until Fate, disguised as gangster Scarface Boston Jimmy, stepped in with an amazing change of program

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Planet," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HIJACKED.

IT all happened absolutely without warning.

The seventy-five-foot motor-yacht Miami was anchored not far from Belle Isle, off the Newfoundland coast. Her owner, Tom Jones, had just obtained his S.B., *summa cum laude*, from Harvard, and was taking a well-deserved summer rest, *en route* to visit some friends in Grenfell's colony in Labrador, before hanging out his shingle as a consulting engineer in the fall. At the moment, he sat in the shade of the

pilot-house of his boat, with one of the crew, both fishing for tautog. The other member of the crew was polishing up the twin-six engines.

The navigator, Captain Antone Pease Ferreira, lay in the bunk room, dozing. Ferreira's sixteen-year-old tomboy daughter, who had come on the cruise with her father, was at the moment helping the Chink cook in the galley. The ship's cat lay in the sun on the deck. The Harvard Yacht Club flag flapped lazily at the masthead. All was blissfully peaceful.

The motor of another boat could be heard not far away. Then that sound ceased, and all was still again. There came a dull thump somewhere behind them, and the Miami trembled.

"Mike," announced the young owner of the Miami, "that sounds as though something bumped us. Will you go and see?"

Mike Murphy, a Cambridge cop whom Jones had laughingly invited to join his crew, arose, handed his fishline to his employer, stretched himself, and ambled off around the pilot-house. Several minutes passed without his return, so Tom Jones finally hitched both lines to a cleat, and went to see what was keeping Mike.

As he rounded the pilot-house he was met by a strange young man holding an automatic as if he were quite used to doing so.

"Stick 'em up!" commanded the other, and Tom promptly obeyed. The hijacker, if such he was, had a rather likable face, now set in stern enough lines. He seemed about Tom's own age. He had wavy black hair, a small black mustache; his complexion was dark, but smooth and clear save for a long, rather distinguished-looking scar across his right cheek bone.

On one side of him stood a thickset, sinister, sour-visaged Italian. On the other side stood a small, middle-aged, wizened, horsy individual. All three looked like city gangsters to him.

MIKE MURPHY lay, bound and gagged, in the scuppers. Lashed to the rail was a craft slightly smaller than the Miami, and from it a villainous-looking crew were busily u n l o a d i n g packing boxes labeled "Canned Goods."

"What's the great idea?" Tom Jones demanded indignantly, but with his hands still held high.

"Our boat is leaking like a sieve, so we thought we'd change ships," succinctly replied the scar-faced man.

"Then why didn't you ask for help like a gentleman?" said Tom. "I'd gladly have given you a lift."

The only answer was a snort. Then, "Frisk him, boys."

In a few moments Tom Jones, bound and gagged, was lying beside Mike Murphy in the scuppers.

The u n l o a d i n g of the "canned goods" proceeded rapidly; then one of the intruders ran a fuse into the gas-tank of their deserted ship, lit the fuse, and cast their ship off, at the mercy of the strong tide. Several minutes later, after drifting quite a distance, it exploded with a dull *boom*.

The Miami's engines were started, and she headed out to sea. Scarface and the heavy Italian then returned to where Tom and Mike still lay bound.

"Better bump 'em off, boss," the Italian was saying, as they approached.

"Too crude, Nick," replied the other. "We may need them to put up a front for us, if that British Navy boat that chased us in the Gulf of St. Lawrence ever gets on the trail again."

"Navy?" thought Tom to himself. "Since when has the British Navy been chasing rum-runners?"

Scarface continued, "We mustn't miss a single bet in getting these guns safely to Costa Rica."

So that was it? Gun-running, rather than rum-running. Filibusters, not bootleggers. Why, Tom thought, he might even consider joining in an expedition like this himself. Filibusters! Latin-American revolutions! Soft southern skies! Beautiful *señoritas!* Glamour! Intrigue! Excitement! What young college graduate would not take a flyer at some Richard Harding Davis filibustering?

He could not fail to observe that no one was offering him such a chance. He was no longer the rich owner of a palatial yacht; he was merely a prisoner of ruthless men who ignored him. He felt suddenly very small and unimportant.

The leader went on, "Untie the Chink and the cabin boy, and make them get us some grub, Nick. And send some one to stow these two in the bunk room."

And he strode forward to the pilothouse. Nick lumbered aft to the galley.

The mention of "cabin boy" brought the young college man to a sudden realization of Theresa Ferreira's predicament. Well, she would be as safe as the rest of them so long as these thugs thought her a boy. Lucky that she was wearing sailor breeches and a loose sailor blouse. With this costume and her boyish bob, it might be some time before this piratical gang found out her sex.

These thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of four burly members of the hijacking crew, who picked up the two bound captives and carried them below. As they passed through the mess-room, Tom saw the horsy little man twiddling with the controls of his nine-tube radio.

In the bunk room lay Captain Ferreira and Si Greene, the other member of Jones's crew, both bound and gagged. Tom and Mike were heaved unceremoniously into the bunks, and were left there, still tied.

An hour or so later food was brought them, and they were ungagged and partially unbound, so that they might eat. But the men who served them refused to answer any of their questions. After the meal, they were bound again.

Still later the Italian named Nick came, and asked them which was the engine-man. Informed that it was Si Greene, Nick released him and led him out. It seemed that one of the motors was behaving badly, and their own men couldn't fix it.

THE boat had begun to pitch and roll, indicating rough weather outside. Scarface came in, jauntily attired in one of Tom's own yachting costumes. He looked almost a gentleman in that outfit. The change in him was startling.

He untied Captain Ferreira. At this, his lieutenant, Nick, who had joined him, protested.

"Don't let too many of them loose, boss," said he.

"It looks like a storm," replied his chief, "and Little Arty has picked up by radio another Navy boat that's on our trail. We need an expert to run the Miami now."

"Don't say I didn't warn you," grumbled Nick, and then the two left with Ferreira.

How long the storm continued Tom never knew or cared. It could have

been days or weeks. The Miami pitched and rolled. Tom, who had thought himself a sailor, was frightfully seasick and utterly indifferent to his surroundings.

When at last he came to, he found that he was no longer tied. Weakly he made his way on deck.

It was a strange and unexpected sight that met his eye. The Miami lay wedged in a floe of ice! And the air was bitterly cold.

Murphy came hobbling up, a pair of handcuffs on his ankles. They were his own handcuffs, mementos of the days when he had been a genial, hard-drinking Cambridge policeman and a favorite with Tom Jones's Harvard crowd.

"Where are we, Mike?" asked Tom, bewildered.

The Irishman scratched his head.

"I haven't been loose myself very long," he replied, "but as near as I can figure out, we've been blown way north in that divil of a storm, and are somewhere up near the top of Greenland. I heard Ferreira mention Smith's Sound."

Then the cold air drove them both below again.

In the mess-room Little Arty was tuning in Tom's radio-set. Nick Fratelli was paging through a pile of Tom's magazines. Four tough-looking men of diversified nationality were playing poker with Tom's best pack of cards. Every one seemed perfectly at home. The owner of the Miami felt almost like an intruder on his own boat. He sat down heavily in a corner, and dully watched the game. Little Arty gave him a friendly grin, and Nick Fratelli glowered at him over his magazines, but no one else paid him the least attention.

Mike Murphy, his own man, came over and sat with him, and explained the situation briefly as follows: These men were part of the gang of Scarface Boston Jimmy. They had taken a contract to run a boatload of rifles and ammunition from Canada to Central America, but had been intercepted, driven off their course, and quite badly shot up when the naval patrol got wind of their scheme. So they had exchanged their own sinking ship for the Miami. But they had not dared buck that terrific storm, and now were lost somewhere in the frozen north.

Tom glanced around the room. The hijackers did not look particularly dangerous or vicious now; and Tom, who had been tensing himself for an instant clash, made up his mind to appear matter-of-fact and peaceful as he watched for an opening to turn the tables on his captors. Though there was little enough advantage to be gained now, imprisoned together in the ice as they all were.

Then Captain Ferreira came in.

"Well, well, well!" said the bluff old sea dog. "Glad to see you up again. We're stuck in the Arctic ice."

"So I see," replied Tom, a bit coldly. Then suddenly, "How's Terry?"

"*He's* all right," said her father, with the accent on the "he."

So their captors hadn't yet discovered Theresa's sex. Good!

That evening both crowds ate together. Ferreira, Terry, and Si Greene seemed quite at home among the intruders. Scarface was genial, though reserved. Only Nick Fratelli and one other—a bullet-headed Dutchman—remained sullenly aloof.

Then, because their clocks showed it to be nighttime, although the Arctic sun was still shining, they turned in. Tom slept in the bunk room with the crew, instead of in his own palatial

stateroom, which had been usurped by the masterful Scarface.

THE next day the ice began to loosen, but unfortunately it drifted north, carrying the Miami with it. The south wind stiffened. Antone Ferreira called all hands on deck, to fend off ice. He was determined to make a frantic attempt to nose their way south through the drifting floe.

The Portuguese was in his element. He stood in the bow of the boat and took command. Scarface Boston Jimmy stood beside him, backing up the captain's authority. Tom Jones manned the wheel in the pilot-house, glad to have a hand in the running of his own boat once more. Si Greene tended the gasoline engines. The rest of the party were on deck, fending off the chunks of ice. Even Terry and Charley Loy, the Chinese cook, lent a hand. Every one helped except Tabby, the ship's cat.

Night came—that is to say, nighttime, for now they were at a latitude where the sun never set, at that season of the year, but merely circled the heavens, so night and day were divided off arbitrarily for them by the clock. It was time for them to turn in and rest, yet still they struggled on. The crew, enervated by seasickness and loafing, wanted to quit and call it a day, but Captain Ferreira insisted that it wasn't safe to quit.

However, he encouraged them with the prospect that the wind might die down at any moment and give them a chance to rest.

"If it doesn't," muttered Nick the Rat under his breath, "there's going to be trouble."

The crew groaned, grumbled, and finally threatened. The unfailing good humor and merry disposition of the supposed cabin boy kept up their spirits for a while, but at last even the effect of this lessened. Scarface cheered them on, and finally drove them with his dominating force.

But they were tired and cold. Although the sun did not set, yet it was very low. The sky was overcast, and the wind chill.

The sea was black and ominous. A dark fog arose, out of which fantastic white shapes of ice would suddenly ride into the beams of their searchlights and threaten to overwhelm them. The whole effect was ghastly.

Finally Nick Fratelli threw down his pole and announced defiantly, "I quit!"

Captain Ferreira was horrified. "Damn it, this is mutiny!"

"I think not," remarked Scarface quietly. "Nick, are you working or leaving the ship?"

There was no note of pleading in his tone, merely a calm assurance. A hush fell over the entire boat, as every one else stopped work and watched the two.

Nick stood, still defiant, hands on hips, facing his chief. Scarface stared back, a slightly amused smile on his lips.

Nick had crossed wills with his chief many times before, but never successfully. This time he was determined to make it stick.

Just then a huge piece of ice, the largest yet that night, loomed suddenly ahead, a bit to starboard. Ferreira shouted an order. Tom swung the wheel hard-a-starboard. But still the cake bore down on them.

"All hands ward off that iceberg," shouted Scarface Jimmy, and there was a general rush to the bow.

When the excitement was over, they noticed that Nick too was among them,

holding his pole; it was the end of the mutiny.

IT was not long until Captain Ferreira announced, "Wind's dying down. It's likely to stop any moment now. Come on, boys, only a little more work to-night."

Encouraged by these words, all hands fell to and slaved like beavers. The Miami zigzagged ahead through the now almost stagnant but rapidly packing ice.

Presently Ferreira looked overside, stared aloft, and said, "Wind's down. All right, boys, we can't do any more to-night."

The ice was tightly packed around them again.

The order to go below was received with a weary cheer. But the rise in spirits was only momentary. They were all cold, exhausted, disgusted, their nerves at the breaking-point.

The next day was Friday, and there came staggering toward them across the ice a half-starved Eskimo. These two events may seem to have no connection with each other, but when they took the poor native aboard it led to their naming him—as had Robinson Crusoe—after the day on which he was found. They fed him and adopted him into the party, not alone from humanitarian motives, but likewise because his knowledge of Arctic life might come in handy. The dour and unfriendly Nick Fratelli even volunteered to teach him English.

SHORTLY thereafter a large crack developed in the ice. But the crack led only northward from there, and they wanted to go south. To the south was only unbroken ice.

Scarface, however, hated inaction.

"We'll go northward," said he. "I've heard that there's an open sea at the north pole. Perhaps we may be able to get out of that sea some other way."

Captain Ferreira assented, though for a different reason.

"We might even reach the pole," said he. "I used to dream of reaching the pole, when I was a boy on whaling voyages, but we never got even as far north as this."

"At least we won't meet any patrol boats up here," added Nick.

Soon the Miami was chugging northward.

Their progress was rapid—surprisingly so. The crack got wider and wider. But all this was leading them away from anywhere, into the unknown, and there were angry murmurs.

Then Scarface called them all together and made a startling announcement.

Said he, "I've been checking up on our speed and comparing it with the latitude readings which Captain Ferreira has been jotting down in the log-book."

"What's latitude?" asked the filibuster named Cicero.

"Aw, it's those lines on a map," snorted Little Arty.

Nick Fratelli glowered.

"Right, Arty," continued Scarface. "Well, those lines on the map mark off about seventy miles of distance to each degree of latitude, and our results don't check at all. We are making about twelve miles to a degree, instead of seventy."

"I've noticed that, and worried about it," interjected the ship captain.

"Well, don't worry any more," replied Scarface Boston Jimmy, with a reassuring smile, "for I've found the answer in a book."

"Nautical Almanac?" asked Ferreira hopefully.

"No. ARGOSY. I found some old copies in my cabin. There's a story I've been reading, about two young Milwaukee aviators who flew up to discover the north pole, and found a hole several hundred miles across, instead of a pole. The hole leads down into the center of the earth. The rapid curvature of the edge of that hole accounts for the fact that our latitude and our mileage don't check up. We think we are nearly at the pole, when really we're merely near the edge of that hole. See, here's a diagram of it in the magazine. That would explain it, wouldn't it, Jones?"

THE young Harvard man and several of the others crowded around to look at the picture. But most of the men were frankly uninterested.

Nick Fratelli smiled craftily to himself. In browsing through the magazines he too had run across this story, and had spelled out enough of it to form a theory as to where they were bound for. He had made some very definite plans for himself in this connection, but these plans he was keeping under his cap.

Tom Jones, in reply to their leader's question, reluctantly admitted that, if such an absurd state of affairs as a polar orifice were possible, it undoubtedly would explain the discrepancy between their mileage and their apparent latitude.

Then Scarface read to the crowd enough snatches from "The Radio Flyers" to give every one an idea of the author's theory of the polar hole, and the lost race of Vikings that inhabit the land inside the earth.

"Boys," he announced, "perhaps our getting blown north is going to let us in on a rich racket! I've a notion to try and go down through this hole in the top of the earth. There's enough rifles and ammunition to arm us all. The boat has its two machine guns, and most of us have gats. Listen to how the story ends."

Then he read:

"Here is the land of eternal warmth, where the sun always shines. Here there is rich soil, big game, room for all. Here we have found power, adventure, happiness. We, Vikings, greet you of the outer wall. *Skaal!*"

But Tom Jones smiled a superior smile to himself. What gullible creatures these men were! He, as the only educated person in the party, knew that the story of the polar hole was mere absurd fiction.

All that day the Miami sped along. The wind was from the south, and the air was full of driving snow.

With the low hang of the sun, the clouded sky, and the thick drive of the snow, there was scarcely more light than at twilight back home, and what light there was had an ominous yellow-green color. Huge cakes of ice kept bobbing up unexpectedly to menace them, out of the wall of snowflakes which surrounded them. The searchlights were tried, but they only seemed to draw the wall closer, so they were shut off again.

Gradually the snowfall lessened. The obstructing ice cakes seemed farther and farther apart. Suddenly the sun shone upon them from dead ahead, the last flakes fluttered down, and in front of them was open water, stretching as far as the horizon.

The captain took a sextant-reading.

"Boys," he announced, "at this rate, we shall be at the pole in a few hours."

"Aw, forget it," sneered Nick Fratelli. "You guys read so much, and yet you can't remember for even a few hours that there ain't no north pole. Didn't the boss tell us that there ain't no pole? Even I have got that through my thick head."

"You're right, Nick," agreed Scarface, "both as to the pole and as to your head. There's nothing in either."

Nick Fratelli glowered.

As they sped along, the captain took frequent observations; and finally he announced: "We may not be at the north pole, but at least we're where the north pole would be if there were any such place. We're at 90° latitude."

A cheer went up from the crew, but Nick the Rat sneered again: "Aw, forget it. If they was any pole, it wouldn't be here. It would be 'way out ahead of us in the middle of the big hole we're bound for."

"Well, anyhow," commented Tom Jones, "if there is a pole, that's where we are now; and, if there isn't, we have an amazing adventure awaiting us inside the earth!"

CHAPTER II.

DESCENT INTO THE UNKNOWN.

THE Miami now proceeded to eat up latitude at a rate that would have indicated a perfectly phenomenal speed for the ship if the curvature of the earth, where they were, were such that some seventy miles equaled one degree, as would be the case in the inhabited portions of the globe.

Eighty-nine degrees, eighty-eight, eighty-seven, were successively indicated by the sextant.

A night shift was put at the wheel and the engine and the rest turned in.

When they awoke, it was noon. The captain estimated that they were well below eighty degrees, as the sun had set behind them.

"If we are still on the outer surface of the earth," said Ferreira hesitantly, "we'll strike Siberia to-morrow at this rate. But I'm beginning to believe the truth of that story which the boss read us."

The wind blew from dead ahead, and was quite warm.

By midnight, the sun was well up in the sky, and a sextant-reading showed that they had reached latitude 60°. In spite of the bright sun, the northern lights now showed brilliantly to the south of them.

"According to our clock," announced the Portuguese, "we are on the 120th meridian. At 60° north latitude, 120° east longitude, we ought, by rights just now, to be crossing southern Siberia, and about to enter Manchuria. And yet here it is open sea! Furthermore, we can't have come as far as thirty normal degrees of latitude in this short time. So I guess this cock-and-bull magazine yarn must be the truth, after all."

"According to our clocks it's midnight," remarked Murphy, "and yet look at the sun! And last noon, it was pitch dark. This has daylight saving beat a mile for complications!"

"But you forget," explained Captain Ferreira, "that we are on the other side of the earth now, where night is day and day is night."

"Then let's shift our clocks," suggested some one, "and start going to bed when it's dark and getting up when it's light."

"You forget," objected Scarface, "that we are not on the other side of the earth, at all. We are passing over the rim of the polar hole into the *center*

of the earth. And, if the story is correct, it will soon be noon all day long every day."

"What I can't figure out," interjected Tom Jones, "is why the sun doesn't rise in the west and set in the east, now that we are inside the polar rim."

"It does," replied Ferreira.

"No such thing," exclaimed Tom, shocked out of his usual politeness. "Look here. When the sun rose, I faced north, and the sun rose on my right. Right hand is east, when you face north, isn't it?"

"Not when you've gone over the top and got inside the earth," explained the captain. "You see, when you're inside the earth, the sun rises in the west; but, as the west is now on the right-hand side of you when facing north, everything looks natural, just as before."

"It all depends on how you define 'east' and 'west,' doesn't it?" Tom objected, still unconvinced. "How would you define them?"

"SUPPOSE you had a pasteboard globe representing the earth," explained Ferreira, "the kind you get in school, you know."

"Yes?" said Tom, interestedly.

"Well, on the outside of the earth, 'east' means the direction toward which the surface of the earth is turning, doesn't it? Let's imagine you draw an arrow on the globe, representing east."

"Yes."

"Well, suppose you open up the globe to get a look at the inside of the pasteboard, which would represent where we are now, and suppose you draw an arrow on the inside, in exactly the same direction as the arrow on the outside, its head just under the head of the outside arrow, tail under tail. This inside arrow would point east, too, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, if it's drawn as you describe," Jones admitted.

Then triumphantly, "That inside arrow would point to the left of north; and so east is to the left of north inside the earth."

"Oh, I see," interjected Jimmy, with a snicker. "East is west and west is east, and never the twain shall meet."

"Not at all!" replied Ferreira testily, nettled by his chief's levity. "Here I get converted to your theory, and explain it logically, and then you go and make fun of it."

"Well, it's all clear as mud to me," asserted Little Arty. "Let's eat."

Sun setting in the morning, and rising in the evening. Sun setting in the east and rising in the west. East and west reversed from where they should be. It was all wrong!

"Fortunately this won't last long," said Tom, "or we'd go crazy."

The ship plowed on in darkness lit by the pink beams of the aurora borealis. And the location of the aurora was all wrong, too, lying south of them instead of north.

No stars showed in the southern part of the sky. It was as though a great bowl was gradually closing over the heavens from the south, slowly blotting the stars out with a distinct line of advance. And the edge of this bowl was faintly illumined, like the surface of the moon.

When next the sun rose, it rose from behind the rim of this bowl, rather than from the horizon. And then they observed what they had not noted before—that although there was a well-defined horizon ahead of them and behind them, which looked abnormally

near, yet on each side of them the sea seemed to stretch away forever, curving up rather than down, until it merged into the sky in the distance.

Of course! To each side of them stretched the inside surface of the earth, curving ever upward; whereas behind and in front of them the water bent sharply across the edge of the polar rim.

By midnight, when the sun was almost overhead, their reading showed 25° latitude, and yet they knew that they were only a few miles inside the earth.

Soon the sun set behind the opposite edge of the rim, which by now had enveloped nearly half the sky. As they chugged on, they anxiously awaited its reappearance on their left, but it never reappeared. Instead, about fifteen hours later, a new and redder orb showed above the southern horizon, and rose slowly as they sped toward it.

"The central sun!" cried Jimmy.

Yet, in spite of their reading, it was hard to persuade some of them that they had not turned off their course; for a sun, by rights, ought to rise in the east or, at least, in the west, in this topsy-turvy world, rather than in the south.

Their gyro-compass, however, showed that they were still headed due south, and their gyro latitude-indicator appeared to show that they were a bit below the equator. Yet the climate was merely temperate; and whenever the wind blew from the north, quite chilly; in other words, like spring or fall in Massachusetts or Chicago.

LAND now appeared; many small islands among which the Miami threaded her way.

Some of the larger islands they explored, but found nothing of interest except some quite sizable rodents which they killed for meat. Tom was thrilled at this new world, of whose existence he had never dreamed, but this did not prevent him from keeping constantly on the alert for a chance to escape or regain control of the yacht. Scarface, however, never left Tom or any of Tom's former employees on the Miami, without making sure that they were outnumbered by fully-armed men of his own.

Scarface himself was as interested as Tom in this new world. So was Captain Antone Ferreira. But the rest of the party appeared either indifferent or bored. Nick Fratelli kept his views to himself.

One day they were resting after their return from an exploring expedition on shore. Arty was trying to get Sydney, Australia, his favorite station, on the air, with Friday as an attentive listener. But he didn't have any luck.

"It's no use," Arty asserted sadly. "Can't hardly get a thing now. Ever since we passed that place which Ferreira calls 90°, I've been having more trouble with the set. First all the little stations faded out. And then things kept on getting worse and worse, until to-day I can't tune in on even WEAF, KDKA or WLW. All I've got left now is WGY, I suppose on account of its extra-short wave."

"Ain't that awful!" snorted Nick the Rat, with mock sympathy. "What do you expect us to do about it? Weep?"

Arty gave him a black look, but said nothing. He was used to Nick's gibes at his interest in radio. Nick left the room.

The little ex-jockey continued twiddling the knobs. Scarface sat in his private cabin, reading. Charley Loy was in the galley. Nick Fratelli and

little Terry were in the bunk room. The rest of the crew were variously employed, and all was quiet.

But things didn't stay quiet long. It was the lull before the storm. A loud commotion was heard in the bunk room, and then Nick rushed out, with his face streaming blood.

"That damn little cat scratched me!" he snarled.

"Tabby?" asked Arty incredulously.

"Tabby, me eye!" replied Nick. "It was Terry Ferreira."

"Well," drawled Arty, "what were you doing to him?"

"Him?" exclaimed Nick scornfully; but just then the child burst through the door with cheeks aflame, and shouted: "You beast—I'll teach you to get fresh with me. Can't you leave a girl alone?"

"Girl?" gasped Arty.

"Sure she's a girl," grinned Nick, "and she's going to be my girl, too. I seen her first. But she's a young wild cat, and will have to be tamed."

"YOUR girl?" sneered Terry. "You dirty bum! I'd rather have even Charley Loy or Friday for my boy-friend than you."

"I'll teach you to talk back to me!" shouted Nick, advancing menacingly toward her.

"None of that, Rat!" snapped Arty. "Come on, Friday."

As the two leaped between Terry and her tormentor, a door at the other end of the mess-room opened.

"Well," said a calm and level voice, "what's the disturbance?"

It was Scarface.

"Nick has insulted a lady, and so we was rescuing her," explained Arty.

"She's mine!" asserted Nick belligerently. "I seen her first."

"Lady? She?" inquired their chief in a bewildered voice.

"Me," said Terry, proud of being the cause of so much commotion.

Scarface advanced into the center of the room.

"You—a girl?" he asked.

"Sure," answered little Terry. "What did you think I was? Besides, no one ever asked you to take me on this trip; I was shanghaied. I never told you I wasn't a girl, did I? And this has all been such fun, until that beast started to get mushy."

"Well, I'll be—" began Arty, but words failed him.

"Then your name isn't Terry?" asked Scarface.

"Sure it is," she replied. "Theresa Ferreira. Terry, for short. But, Mr. Jimmy, you'll keep that wop away from me, won't you?"

"Keeping bums away from ladies is one of the easiest things I do," asserted Scarface. "You will occupy my stateroom."

"Ah," sneered Nick the Rat, "so you want her for yourself, do you? Well, I seen her first; and let me tell you, Scarface—"

He stopped abruptly. He was looking into the muzzle of an automatic.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLORERS IN A WEIRD WORLD.

"NICK," asserted Scarface, still covering the other with his gat, "you haven't even the first instincts of a gentleman, so I shan't bother to reply to your insinuations. Arty, will you go and tell this girl's father to stop the ship for a minute, and that I wish to see all hands in the mess-room? Miss Ferreira, please be seated."

"Gee," exclaimed Terry, slumping into a chair.

When all fourteen had gathered in the mess-room, Scarface returned his gun to his pocket, and addressed them:

"Little Terry Ferreira is a girl."

He paused for the import of this announcement to sink in. Captain Ferreira's face went ashy gray.

Scarface continued grandiloquently: "We are honored by the unsuspected presence of a lady on this trip, and must treat her with due respect. From now on, I shall bunk with the rest of you. Miss Theresa will occupy, alone and exclusively, what formerly was my stateroom. She is to be treated like a lady. If any member of this crew annoys her in the least way, there'll be one less of us. Is that understood? Then you may all go. Captain Ferreira, start up the ship again."

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy, but you're grand!" said Theresa admiringly. "To think what I've been missing all this while, by your not knowing I was a girl!"

The boat got under way again. Scarface moved his belongings into the bunk room, then went to the bow, where Captain Ferreira was directing the navigation. Murphy was standing beside him.

"What time is it now, sir?" asked Mike, as he approached. "This is worse than daylight saving. There seems to be *nothing but* daylight up here. The sun stays in one spot in the sky, and it never gets to be any other time of day. This must be where they send all the daylight to, that they save up, back in the United States."

"I've always said," added Ferreira, "that if the Lord had wanted daylight saving, he would have made the clocks that way in the first place."

Scarface glanced at his wrist watch.

"It's 4 P.M.," he announced. "Time to change the watch; think I'll rearrange the shifts a bit. We must keep some one on guard all the while, for there's no telling when some strange creatures may attack us in this lost world, according to what we've read of it. Ferreira, you can have Arty, Si, Mike, George, Swede and Cicero. I'll sit up for another watch, and take the wheel. Scutari can run a gas-engine fairly well; he used to be a chauffeur. Nick the Rat can take your post. Tom and the Eskimo and your daughter can help watch for trouble. Let's go on farther inside the earth. If anything exciting happens, I'll call you."

Nick Fratelli was considerably mollified by being placed over Scarface, by Scarface himself. Also at having little Miss Terry in his shift. But he would have preferred to have had the latter pleasure, unadulterated by the former honor.

As they changed shifts, Antone Ferreira drew their leader aside.

"Sir," said he, "will you pardon me for suggesting, sir, that you're making a big mistake in trusting that Fratelli person? When he mutinied, back there in the ice, you'd ought to have put him in irons. Instead, you give him the run of the ship, and insult and trust him by turns. I can tell by the nasty look in his eye that he's just waiting for a chance to do you dirt."

"My dear captain," replied Scarface suavely, "you don't understand how to handle men. I've known Fratelli for years. I've managed him, and dozens of others like him. There's only one way to treat that type: trust them, and bully them, and make them like it. Then they will fear you and love you. That's the way Julius Cæsar used to do, and it's the secret of his and my success. Nick may blus-

ter occasionally, and give me black looks, but he wouldn't dare try to 'do me dirt,' as you say."

As they separated, the navigator sadly shook his head, and muttered to himself: "Not merely dumb, as I had thought he was, but swell-headed. Oh, so swell-headed. It amounts to the same thing, in the end. I see trouble ahead for him—for all of us."

LATER that watch they were coasting some land on their right, when Scarface Jimmy suddenly exclaimed: "Look! See that crescent-shaped beach, with the cliffs behind it, and the woods on top? I'll bet that's where Eric Redmond first met the beautiful Viking girl. Remember about it in 'The Radio Flyers'? If so a path from the summit of the cliffs must lead to the plateau city, the northernmost outpost of Viking civilization. Let's land, and find out."

So the Miami swung her bow to starboard, and nosed gently in to the beach.

"It must be the place!" asserted Tom hopefully. By this time he had carefully read the story in question. "I believe that that long low rock to the right is the one that Eric hid behind, in his fight with the Eskimo-like natives, Skraelings."

Tom and Scarface had been navigating the ship together. They rushed on deck. The change in the course and the subsequent bump against the shore diverted the crew from their various preoccupations, and they now crowded out to see what was up.

Their leader ran his eye over them. Then he announced briskly:

"I want to tell you boys—and the young lady—that I think we have arrived at the landing-place of one of the cities of the Vikings. You all have read the story. Doesn't this look like the beach from which runs the path to the plateau, where Angus Selkirk rules as yarl? 'Beyond the Alps lies Italy.'"

"You don't mean to say that these are the Alps?" asked Nick Fratelli hopefully.

"Of course not, you dumb idiot!" scornfully replied Jimmy. "I was merely quoting some remarks that another great man—N a p o l e o n—once made under similar circumstances."

"Well, try to keep down to earth as much as possible," grumbled the Italian. "We ain't all of us read books like you, you know."

Jimmy went on unabashed. "When I told you about the polar hole and my idea of hunting up a new racket down here, I didn't fully let you in on my plans. The world was invited here to colonize, but we have come here to stick up these squareheads. According to the story, there are only two civilized persons in this whole place, namely, the two Milwaukee boys, Eric Redmond and Angus Selkirk. Their plane is out of gas. Their rifles must be pretty near out of ammunition. We have plenty of both, and our gats and machine guns besides. With your help, I can put myself at the head of the government, make these Vikings fight for me, and conquer this whole new world. Stick to me, boys, and you'll all wear diamonds."

His announcement did not meet with the unanimity of approval that he had expected.

"Ay tank you ban make wan great mistake," enunciated Swede Johnson slowly. "T'ose Viking von't be so easy, I tank not."

"Do you call this exactly square?" added Tom Jones. "Two of your own fellow-countrymen come down here, win the love and affection of these people, and lead them to victory. Then

they publish a general invitation to the U. S. A. to follow them and colonize. With the whole center of the earth open to you, do you call it exactly decent to pick on these two young men, and try to oust them from control, and enslave their people?"

"Jones!" snapped Jimmy, his scar showing dangerously red. "That will be just about all from you. You're not the chaplain of this trip."

Tom struggled to control his wrath, while Mike Murphy interposed his objection: "I don't know, chief. What's the use of shooting up some perfectly peaceful squareheads, when there seems to be plenty of land to go around, without doing that? I don't know."

"Murphy!" interrupted Jimmy, his scar still red. "When a policeman enlists under a gun-runner, he may expect to have to do things which do not exactly constitute preserving the peace. Any one else got any objections?"

Murphy, too, subsided, and the others hastened to register their approval.

"I SHALL take a small force, and reconnoiter," announced the masterful Scarface. "Murphy, Ferreira, Greene, Jones and Cicero. Nick, you are left in command in my absence. I wish you'd get busy teaching that Eskimo some English. You've been at it for days now, and we may need him at any moment as an interpreter to the savages here."

Nick Fratelli smiled a crafty smile to himself. He had purposely taught Friday little or no English. But he had managed to get Friday to teach him considerable of the Eskimo language—of which fact, however, no one else except Cicero had as yet any suspicion.

All hands turned in for a sleep.

After breakfast the next "morning," the members of the scouting party were each fitted out with rifle, automatic pistol, cartridge belt, and condensed rations.

Terry begged to be taken, but Jimmy told her: "I couldn't bear to risk your life."

She pouted and replied: "Gee, Mr. Scarface, does that mean that I'm going to miss all the fun of this trip? I wear boy's clothes still. Why can't you treat me as a boy again for a while?"

She begged so insistently that finally she was promised a place on the very next adventure.

Then the six pioneers set out. At the top of the cliff they found a path, as expected, and pressed on along it, uphill through the woods.

Nothing of moment happened, until about an hour later, when the bushes ahead of them at one side of the trail suddenly parted, and out stepped a gigantic black leopard, crouched low and tense.

The horrified explorers stopped dead in their tracks. Several started to draw their futile automatics—all the rifles were strapped across their backs—but Scarface signalled them down with a single peremptory gesture, for the beast was so near that to fire would be but to invite immediate and disastrous attack.

The leopard seemed intent on something across the path ahead of him. He stood motionless, except for his twitching tail, with his side toward them—the very picture of deadly feline grace and peril. They did not breathe as they stood motionless, and waited, too.

Finally, after what seemed ages, the head of the beast swung slowly around, until his yellow eyes regarded them

squarely. The invaders wilted, unsure whether to stay "frozen" or make a frantic effort at defense or escape.

Then, as slowly, the leopard's head swung back to its original position, and it gave a tremendous bound, off the path into the tropical undergrowth. A moment or two later there came the death-scream of some smaller creature.

The six men unslung their rifles, and rushed past the haunted spot, and on up the mountain trail, as fast as their legs would carry them. After a run of several hundred yards, they paused, out of breath.

"You know," panted Cicero, "I prefer Chicago. It's a much safer place to live in. Look at the size of the black cat that just crossed our path!"

"And darn lucky for you that he crossed it, me lad," said Murphy, "instead of coming down it."

This quip somewhat restored the spirits of the party, and they started on again up the trail.

AT last, after many hours, they emerged upon open land, but it was not what they expected. Instead of a level plain they had read about, carpeted with red-pollinated flowers, and the massive cliff of the plateau rising in the distance, the field before them sloped sharply upward to a rugged and rocky mountain-top.

And when they reached the summit, there was no plateau to be seen ahead. Instead, the land sloped downward on all sides. The mountain on which they stood was the crowning eminence of a long peninsula. On three sides of them lay the island-dotted sea; while to the south there was a gradually descending ridge of lower peaks, and a widening of the land, which stretched off and up, without a break of sea, until it blended with the sky in the dim gray distance.

"Where's your Viking city, chief?" asked Murphy with a grin that took all the sting out of the taunt.

Tom was sincerely glad that they hadn't found it, with Scarface's racketeer intentions; but he hastened to console their leader.

"It would really have been too much to hope for," said he, "to have stumbled on the place right off the bat."

"Of course!" Ferreira suddenly interjected. "Eric and Angus went over the edge at longitude 30° off the northern tip of Greenland. We went over at longitude 60° up through Smith Sound. They headed due south. So did we. Our route must be about two hundred and fifty miles from theirs and rapidly diverging. We ought to head southwest to find them."

"Don't you mean southeast?" suggested Tom.

"Oh, hang this back-handed compass-system that they have down here!" snorted the ship-captain. "What I mean is, turn our bows to starboard. You can figure out the direction, and name it whatever you please."

"Look!" interrupted Cicero. "Isn't that an airplane off there to the south?"

All stared in the direction in which he was pointing. It certainly looked like a plane. And yet not quite.

"It must be one of those huge flying reptiles," asserted Scarface. "*Skwaas,* they call them. Bat-winged lizards seem to take the place of birds, when you get far enough into this country."

Then, for a while they stood in silence, taking in the view on all sides, while the motionless central sun beat down on them from exactly overhead. The rocks about them were covered with mosses and lichens. The sky was

strangely off color, a dark and velvet blue, graying where it met the land or sea on every side.

It was easy enough to realize that they were inside a huge ball. In fact, the effect of blending of earth and sky made the ball seem infinitely smaller than it really was—gave them a sort of cooped-up feeling, hard to describe.

Turning their eyes to things nearer at hand, they scanned the dark green forests which surrounded them almost without a break.

"All this land will one day be covered by farms, and cities, and railroads, and concrete roads," exulted Scarface, but it was plain to see that he was talking more to himself than to his companions.

"Oughtn't we take possession in the name of the United States of America?" suggested Tom.

"No such thing!" retorted Scarface. Then, striking his foot on the rock, he declaimed: "I hereby take possession in the name of James Lefavour, alias Scarface Boston Jimmy."

"A lot of good it will do us, chief," Murphy cried out sharply. "There goes the Miami, leaving us high and dry in this God-forsaken spot!"

CHAPTER IV.

STRANDED.

"MAROONED!" yelled Antone Ferreira with a curse. "The mutinous dogs!"

They all stared back in the direction from which they had ascended. True enough, the Miami was slipping steadily out into open water, bound a little to the left of south.

"What price empire now?" murmured Tom Jones to himself.

Cicero Tony Schultz also muttered something under his breath, cursing Nick Fratelli for leaving him in the lurch, when it was he who had first sowed the seeds of mutiny in Nick's brain.

"Come on!" shouted Scarface, and led the way back down over the rocks along the path up which they had come.

Panic-stricken, the others followed him. Never before had they realized what the Miami meant to them. With that boat, they were conquerors voyaging to subjugate new lands. Without the Miami, they were merely six city-bred men, unused to the woods, turned loose to shift for themselves in an unmapped and prehistoric wilderness, forced to learn its amazing ways before matches and ammunition gave out and clothing disintegrated. And even if they learned the ways of the woods in time to save their lives, nothing lay before them except a struggle for bare existence until old age finally conquered them one by one.

No wonder they raced madly, insanely, after the departing Miami. But by the time that they had covered the three or four miles to the shore, downhill though it was, the Miami was nowhere in sight. The six men collapsed panting on the top of the cliff which flanked the beach.

When they had rested for a while, they took stock of their provisions and other belongings. From one of his pockets Scarface produced a flash light.

"A lot of good that 'll do us down here, where the sun never sets," remarked Tom Jones.

Its owner eyed him sharply.

"Never saw one of these before, did you?" he asked.

"Why, of course I have," laughed the one-time yachtsman.

"Oh, no, you haven't," asserted the

other positively. "This is a signal-lamp, invented by our radio-hound, Little Arty. This little thing is a complete sending and receiving set. The case is wrapped with fine wire to serve as a coil antenna. Only half the inside is filled with batteries, and they are of a special kind, extra strong. The rest of the space is tube, and capacity, and a lot of other things I don't know the names of. But I do know how the thing works. When some one presses the button on one of them, the light flashes on the other."

Just then the light started flickering.

"Can you read Morse?" asked Scarface.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Then listen in," Scarface ordered.

"Arty sending," came the message. "Nick has me trussed up in the cabin, but I got my hands on the light. The Miami went south only a little way. Nick is on a rampage, and there's hell to pay. Come—"

The message broke off abruptly.

"Look!" exclaimed some one, pointing down the beach to the southward.

All eyes followed the gesture, and saw a man trudging toward them, in what appeared to be civilized clothes which clung to his person as though wet. A series of yells of various sorts proceeded from the six on the cliff-top. The figure looked up and began to run toward them, while they in turn clambered down the face of the cliff and ran to meet him.

IT was Charley Loy, their slant-eyed cook, sopping wet and very woebegone. The six crowded around him and demanded an explanation.

"Dlunk," said he when he had caught his breath. "Nick Flatelli, he get into lum lockers. Dlink lotta lum. Get velly dlunk. Muchee whoopee. Thlow me overboard. Me walkee back flum lide."

Tom Jones was shocked at an abrupt thought that came to him. "Theresa is at the mercy of that crowd of drunken bums! We must rescue her. We thought we had only ourselves to save. But now we've got to save a lady."

"Lady, me eye!" snorted Cicero, still chafing under Nick's duplicity. "I should worry about a skirt!"

"No, you wouldn't," Tom snorted back at him.

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Captain Ferreira, "that you'd all forgotten about my little Terry? Why, that's what worried me about the boat right along."

"This performance," stated Scarface levelly, "is going to be very bad luck for Nick the Rat. Charley, where was the Miami headed for, when you —ah—left the ship? And have you any idea where she is now?"

"Boat not go anywhere special," replied the cook. "Ev'lybody too dlunk. Boat just lun along shore, south. Nowhere particular."

"That fits in with Arty's radio message," Scarface said thoughtfully. "We'll follow the shore south."

Southward they tramped the sandy beach. How long, will never be known, for the sun hung always at noon above them, and no one thought to note the time by his watch. Occasionally they stopped to eat from the remainder of the rations which they carried, but there was no sunset to tell them when to sleep.

At last, when rounding the tip of a promontory of land, they saw the Miami drifting idly in a cove beyond. Before any one could hail her, Scarface had cautioned silence, and mo-

tioned his little band to take cover. But the precaution seemed needless. Not a soul was stirring on board. The boat appeared to be utterly deserted.

"Lord knows where they've all gone," exclaimed Scarface, "but at least we've got our ship back. How many of you can swim?"

Only Tom Jones and Si Greene admitted the accomplishment, so these two and their leader stripped, with the exception of belt and pistol, and waded out into the none-too-warm sea. The Miami was about a quarter of a mile distant, and drifting slowly away, under the influence of an offshore breeze.

"Lie low," was Jimmy's parting injunction to the four on shore. "But if any one appears on deck, then make a disturbance, and try to distract their attention from us."

"I wish I had got some of that rum," muttered Cicero Tony to himself. "If Nick ever gets another chance to make a break, I'm going to stick to him like a plaster."

ALL three of the men in the water were expert swimmers, and rapidly overhauled the Miami. Yet still there was no sign of life on board.

They had almost reached the boat when a shout from the shore caused them to pause and look around. Their first thought was that some one had appeared on deck, and that their four allies were attempting to create a diversion, as they had been instructed to do. But the decks were as deserted as before.

The commotion on the shore continued. The four men, standing on the beach, were pointing to the water to the south. The swimmers looked in that direction, and saw approaching them at a rapid rate what appeared to be a giant dolphin with alligator-like jaws. The nightmarish creature was leaping and diving, and weaving in and out of the surface of the water in its approach.

"An ichthyosaurus!" exclaimed Tom. "It comes from two Greek words—"

"Never mind where it comes from," interrupted Scarface. "It's coming toward us, and it looks hungry. I wish I could wake up from this— Come on, let's go."

And he began a frantic double-overhand toward the Miami, the two others needing no encouragement to make them follow at top speed.

Silas Greene was the least effective swimmer of the three. With appalling swiftness the sea beast bore down on poor Si, and cut him off from his two companions. He at once stopped swimming, and, treading water, drew his pistol and faced his assailant.

But at that very instant another beast of a different sort attacked him from the rear. A head like the dipper of a steam shovel, mounted on the end of a long, snakelike neck, suddenly shot out of the water behind him, and hung suspended over him. His friends gave a cry of warning. But even as he was turning to see what new menace was confronting him, the neck curved, and the head shot down upon him, enveloping the upper half of his body with its horrid jaws.

Jimmy's automatic barked twice. Two red spots appeared in the creature's neck, which gave a writhe as though in pain. At the same instant the other beast, cheated of its prey, hurled itself on the wounded reptile with a hiss of rage. The water, swirling in geysers, closed over the two beasts and their victim.

"He's done for!" gasped Tom.

Scarface was equally horrified. "If he's not, he'll certainly need our help when he comes to the top. Danger or not, we'll wait here till we see if there's any hope for him."

But nothing more was seen of either beast, nor of their prey.

"SHAY," inquired a thick voice out of the air above them, "did you shee what I shaw?"

Scarface whipped out his pistol again, and both men, treading water, looked up. The Miami had drifted almost upon them, and Scutari was leaning over the rail above them, beautifully drunk.

"Put up your water pishtolsh, an' come aboard," said Scutari genially. "Gran' little party!"

"Come on, Tom," said Scarface. "We can't do poor Si any good here, and we may possibly be able to help him from the Miami." Then to the surprisingly amiable drunk above them, "Lower us down a ladder, will you?"

"Shorry," replied Scutari, with a profound bow that nearly tumbled him over the rail. "No laddersh to-day. Thish' my day off."

So the two swimmers clambered up the side as best they could.

As Tom swung his last foot over the rail, the ichthyosaur rose in a graceful curve from the water behind him and snapped within an inch of his heel.

"A rotten miss," exclaimed Scutari. Then applauded feebly: "But it'sh the best show I've ever sheen."

Lying in the scuppers was the body of a man. Scarface turned it over with his foot. It was George, the Syrian.

"Dead?" asked Tom.

"Yes," replied his chief, "dead drunk." Then, to Scutari, "Where are the others?"

"Party in mesh-room," replied the Greek. "Shay, you'll get run in for indeshent exposure. Put on shum closhe. Haw, haw, haw!"

Scarface cuffed him into the scuppers alongside George. Then, brushing off his hands, he strode to the rail again for an anxious look at the spot where poor Si Greene had gone down. But the surface of the water was as calm and placid as though no tragedy had just been enacted there.

With a sigh Scarface turned away and entered the mess-room, followed by his aide.

The only occupants were Theresa and Nick the Rat. The two sat facing each other across the table. The girl was tied to her chair with many turns of rope. The bulky Italian sat at ease in his, with a half-filled glass and a bottle on the table before him. As the door crashed open, he was holding a table-knife by the blade, and was pointing at Theresa with the butt, evidently to emphasize something which he was saying.

As Scarface and Tom entered, Fratelli lumbered unsteadily to his feet and reached for one of his pockets. Instantly he thought better of it—he knew Scarface—and raised his hands aloft. Both of the intruders had drawn their automatics before entering.

"Quick, Tom, frisk him," ordered Scarface Jimmy. "And keep your own gun out of his reach while you do it."

Tom Jones walked over to the Italian and patted the latter's pockets, as he had often seen done in the movies. The patting having developed a lump in the right-hand coat pocket, Tom reached in and pulled out a gat, which he threw upon the table, as he had also seen done in the movies. Scarface hastily scooped up the gun and held it in his other hand.

"Nick, you big bum, you lousy double crosser," growled Scarface, "sit down. Tom, untie Miss Ferreira, and tie up Nick."

Tom approached the captive.

But she expostulated, red-faced, and turning away her eyes, "Aw, gee, Mr. Jones, you and Mr. Jimmy haven't a stitch of clothes on."

SO intent had the two been on the developments since their return on board that they had completely forgotten their lack of attire.

Tom now promptly turned red himself and bolted for the door, only to be stopped by a peremptory, "Jones! There are two men still unaccounted for, and Little Arty's either locked up or knocked out somewhere. Never mind your modesty. Go and locate Swede Johnson and the Eskimo, and make sure that they are not in a position to cause us any trouble. And—and—" Scarface faltered, "you'd better bring me some clothes as soon as you've got those two birds disposed of."

Then his *sang-froid* returned, and he sat down, more or less shielded by the table from Theresa.

In a minute or two Tom Jones returned, clothed and bearing clothes. He untied the girl, and trussed up the Italian. Then Scarface Jimmy withdrew hastily and slipped into the garments which Tom had brought him.

On Scarface's return, his first inquiry concerned Swede and Friday.

"Both asleep in the bunk room," Tom reported.

"And now how are you, my dear?" Scarface asked, turning to Terry. "Did the Rat harm you?"

"Sure he did," replied the girl. "He bruised my arms up terribly with these ropes."

"Is that all?"

"Gee, ain't that enough?"

"Tell us what happened."

"Well," narrated Terry, "you see, after you had gone, the wop here he got nosing around all over the ship, and finally he let out a howl that he'd found a lot of booze. So everybody ran to see, except me and the Chink. The Chink shut himself up in the galley, and I tried to get on shore, but Scutari caught me and brought me back. The wop took me away from the Greek and locked me up in my own room—I mean your room, sir. I bolted the door on the inside, and then some one started up the boat. And they all drank a lot more, and sang and howled. And then the engines stopped, and no one seemed to care."

She paused for a moment, and then continued, "Well, after a while, I heard a splash and a lot of laughter, and I looked out the window—porthole, I mean—and the Chink was swimming away for dear life. They all tried to break down my door, but the wop came and cussed them something awful, so they stopped. Then the wop broke down the door himself, and wanted me to drink with him. So I slapped his face, and he tied me up and said he would teach me to be a lady. And then you came. And I guess that's about all, sir."

"It's quite enough," commented Scarface grimly.

"You poor little kid," said Tom Jones.

"CAN you handle a gun?" Scarface asked her.

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," replied the girl, "you don't want for me to kill the wop, do you?"

"Not exactly," explained Scarface. "That is, not unless it's necessary. I

merely want you to keep him out of mischief, while Jones and I get this boat going."

So saying, he handed her one of the pistols. Grasping it in both hands, she placed its butt on the table and pointed the trembling muzzle at the bound man, who now turned pale for the first time.

"For Pete's sake, Jimmy," Nick begged hoarsely, "take her away! I can't stand to see that gat waving at me."

"Then shut your eyes, you fool," replied Scarface.

"That would be worse," moaned Fratelli, now completely unnerved. "It might go off without my knowing it. Take her away!"

"You've got it coming to you, Nick," asserted Scarface with a malicious smile. "And if Miss Ferreira should happen to get careless or nervous with the trigger, your death would not be on my conscience. Come on, Tom, let's get going. You start the engine."

So saying, he departed for the pilot house, and soon the Miami was chugging back toward shore, where Cicero, Murphy, Captain Ferreira and Charley Loy were taken on board. George and Scutari were promptly lifted from the deck and put to bed. Scarface relieved Terry of the pistol with which she had been guarding Nick. Arty had been located in the galley and untied. Then all hands, except the four drunks, were assembled in the mess-room.

Captain Ferreira warmly embraced his daughter, and then his eyes ranged over those present.

"Where's Si Greene?" he asked. "Did that dolphin get him?"

Scarface Jimmy's face sobered, and his eyes narrowed.

"Si has given up his life for this girl here," he reported. "Two sea-beasts—and they weren't mere dolphins either—pulled him under and fought over him, just as we reached the ship. We waited around, but the poor fellow never came to the top again."

"Moby Dick!" exclaimed the ship captain, horrified.

Terry's eyes flashed around at Nick Fratelli.

"It's all your fault!" she sobbed. "Mr. Greene was a good, good man."

So saying, she jumped at him, but several of the men seized her and held her away.

"Nick has been guilty of mutiny on the high seas," announced Captain Ferreira. "The very least penalty is to be kept in irons until the end of the trip."

"I'll gladly supply the irons," cut in Mike Murphy, the ex-policeman, fishing his pair of handcuffs out of his pocket, and handing them over to his chief.

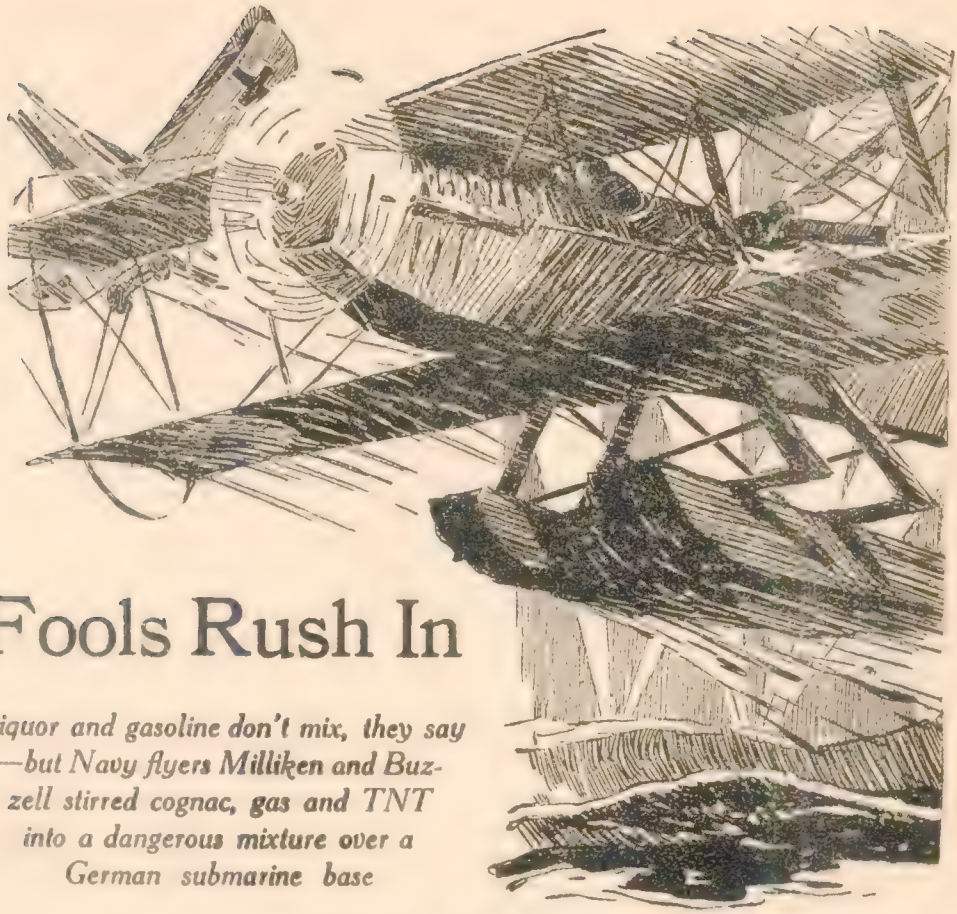
Still glowering, the burly Italian was untied and then manacled.

"I'll give you this much freedom for the present," announced Scarface, "until I decide whether to keep you in irons for the rest of the trip, as Ferreira suggests, or to turn you loose altogether."

Then the party broke up for a few moments' rest, while Charley Loy prepared grub. Arty made a bee-line to his beloved radio; and, to the surprise of every one, got a station almost immediately.

Some one appeared to be broadcasting a speech. But it was in some utterly strange and outlandish language. Furthermore, the dial-setting did not correspond to any station on the earth's surface, most of which were marked in the little radio fan's log.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Fools Rush In

Liquor and gasoline don't mix, they say —but Navy flyers Milliken and Buzzell stirred cognac, gas and TNT into a dangerous mixture over a German submarine base

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

LIEUTENANT - COMMANDER "RED" STEVENS, U. S. N., read the decoded dispatch for the third time. Then he crushed it into a little round ball and pitched it violently into the waste basket. After which, he retrieved it, smoothed it out and tossed it into the file basket.

Rising, he left his room in the old French dwelling which served as officers' quarters and marched into the executive officer's room, where the latter, stretched on his cot, was avidly reading a paper-backed novel.

"Wentworth," snapped the commander, "we're raiding Zeebrugge tonight! Orders from London. Notify the officers."

"But, skipper," protested Lieutenant Wentworth, "our afternoon patrol reported that the German Halberstadt squadron is protecting the U-boat bases this week. We can't take our heavy old ships over that town until the roving Hal squadron moves on."

"We can't, but we're damn well going to. We shove off in two hours."

"IT'S all your fault, you walking bar fly!" asserted Ensign Milliken, focusing his eyes upon the dark bulwarks of the next corner and steer-

ing a course toward it with exceeding care. "If you hadn't hiccuped right in front of the Old Man, he'd never have known that we'd both skipped out for a quiet little drink at the *bistro*."

"Well, I couldn't help it, could I?" retorted Ensign Buzzell, deeply aggrieved. "If I'd been in church, I couldn't have helped it. Besides, I was so busy worrying for fear he would notice you swaying back and forth, tight as the skin on a billiard ball, that I forgot myself."

"A guy who can't hold a couple of drinks better than you can ought to go on the wagon," declared the other with fervor. "In the morning the skipper will be telling us our Paris leave is all off. I wouldn't be surprised if he noted it on our service records, too. Then we'll have a fat chance for another half-stripe."

"How did I know we were going on a raid to-night?"

"I didn't, either, but we both knew we weren't supposed to leave quarters."

"Ssssh!" warned Buzzell. "Walk steady, now, we're getting to the hangar."

In the glaring arc lights suspended from the hangar rafters, officers and men alike were grooming the squadron of seaplanes and flying boats for the serious work of the next few hours.

Naval aviators smoked feverishly, lighting fresh cigarettes before the last were a quarter consumed, all the while nervously watching dungaree-clad mechanics swarming over and under the ships.

Plane chiefs listened anxiously to the roars and growls of the engines; riggers fingered and snapped taut wires; and gunners' mates ducked under wings and fuselages, making sure that each bomb was in its proper place.

Ensigns Milliken and Buzzell discreetly retired to a dim corner of the cavernous hangar. There they waited until the rumbling of heavy cradles and the mounting roar of engines told them that the ships were being rolled out to the launching platform. Then, unobtrusively, the two made their way to their seaplane, which stood in the rear row of machines ready for the sortie.

Ensign Milliken, clambering into the rear cockpit, adjusted his shoulder harness and sat down upon the hard little gunner's stool, while his comrade slipped into the pilot's seat and listened to the mechanic's assurance that all was well with engine and plane.

One after another the flying boats and seaplanes were trundled to the launching quay and dropped overboard into the dark waters of Souilly Harbor. Beyond the curving granite bulk of the breakwater, the English Channel looked ominous and inhospitable.

With a roar and a streamer of flame from their exhaust stacks, the heavy flying boats scuttled across the water and took off, rising heavily to clear the mole by all too scant a margin.

In carefully planned order the lighter seaplane-bombers followed the flying boats. Last off was No. 867, Ensign Buzzell, pilot.

IT was cold in the observer's cockpit. A rent in the linen cover of the fuselage gave entrance to a whistling blast of wind direct from the north pole itself.

It was lonely, too. Except for the smooth, leather-clad head of Buzzell in the front and the dozen-odd streaks of fire from the exhausts of the leading planes, Milliken might have been all alone up there, alone in an infinity of black, cold space.

Far over to his right was the invisible shore line of Belgium, now in the

hands of the enemy. But it was lost somewhere in the darkness; there was not a light to be seen.

Except for the rhythmic thrumming of the engine, the shrill shriek of the cold wind and the gentle swaying of the plane, it was as though Milliken's cockpit were stationary, up there in the night. Lacking a fixed light below by which he might gauge their progress, the observer was conscious of no sense of forward movement.

The exhilaration of the two bottles of red wine which he and his partner had so recently consumed had been lost during the excitement of the first few minutes of flying. Milliken's teeth chattered like castanets and he felt exceedingly low in his mind.

He began to remember the dangers incident to attacking one of the most strongly fortified submarine bases in the world with a squadron of heavy navy planes whose maximum altitude would be less than twelve thousand feet.

He remembered the roving squadron of fast-flying, hard-hitting little German Halberstadts of the Flanders Jagdstaffel, who were said to be based, just now, near Bruges. Tough babies, they were, when summoned to protect Ostende or Zeebrugge against aërial attack. More than one Tellier boat had been driven into the sea by the massed attack of a dozen of these little Hals.

On, on, the motor buzzed her way through the darkness. Buzzell, keeping position, held her as though she were being towed by those ships ahead, whose cheerful exhaust fires alone kept the sky from being altogether too black and lonely to be endured.

Milliken swiveled his Lewis gun on its yoke to loosen up the cosmoline and give him something to do. He wanted to fire a couple of bursts. The noise, the fire and the vibration of its butt against his hand would have been comforting. But they must sneak in on Zeebrugge. Their welcome would be warm enough without giving the Germans twenty minutes in which to prepare.

He shivered and laughed grimly to himself as he remembered hearing a swashbuckling young flyer, just in from the States, tell how there was really no danger in an aërial raid. How many tons of archie did it take to bring an airplane down? But it didn't matter. You didn't laugh much about raiding when you had been over Zeebrugge at twelve thousand feet. Milliken wished he were back at the officers' quarters in a warm, comfortable bed. Or, better, in that *bistro*, imbibing copiously of red wine for a base, then sparingly of cognac to give a thorough, lasting kick.

THE fiery tail of the leading plane was curving to the right. They must be off Zeebrugge, then, heading inshore for the attack. The other flame streaks curved inshore, too. His own seat tilted slightly as Buzzell banked over to follow.

To occupy his mind, Milliken felt for the bomb release ring. Yes. Of course it was there. He counted the trays of ammunition for the Lewis gun. But still, he found himself remembering how that black land ahead would suddenly become like the mouth of hell.

It wouldn't be long now. Not long enough. At any minute one of those big searchlights would bite a huge slice out of the darkness and grope around after the squadron. Gosh, it was cold!

Suddenly he was jerked out of his melancholy abstraction, every nerve tingling. The engine was missing. Where formerly its pulsing drone had been scarcely heard, so accustomed was

he to its ceaseless voice, now its stuttering throb seemed to shriek in his ears. It popped and backfired, ran steadily for an instant, then quit entirely.

With the first unevenness, Buzzell had instinctively nosed down, jazzing the throttle violently. But it was no use. They continued their glide while the straight streaks of exhaust flames from the other ships seemed to rise in the night as the squadron continued upon its course.

Milliken swiveled around in his seat, pressed both hands against the padded cowling of his cockpit and waited for the crash. So dark was the night that the sea appeared to blend into it, showing neither horizon nor surface. The glide seemed to stretch into hours as the big ship drifted down.

Ah, there was the surface! Inky-black, ominous-looking, yet Milliken felt better when he saw it. The whisper of the wind through wires and struts died to nothing as the pilot leveled out. Milliken held his breath as the bottom of his cockpit dropped from under him.

Crash! The big ship careened and leaped again into the air. *Crash!* Milliken was thrown violently against the cowling as she smacked the other pontoon against the solid wall of the next wave. A sheet of cold water whipped his face.

Then they were down, but the lofty fuselage swayed and pitched over the rollers like a canoe in mid-ocean.

"You ought to go back to ground school!" called Milliken. "That was a damn fine landing, except that we were ten feet up!"

"Another wheeze like that," retorted Buzzell, standing up and stretching himself, "and I'll come back there and slap you out of your shoes!"

Milliken unstrapped himself and stood up, but sat down again very suddenly and held on to the sides of his reeling cockpit.

"I think I am going to be seasick!" he said in a shocked voice.

And he was, a fact which he promptly proceeded to demonstrate in a manner so thorough that it occupied his entire attention for several minutes thereafter.

"If you'd only been more quiet," protested Buzzell unhappily, "I'd have been all right. But you've gone and made me sick, too."

AN elongated white sliver split the blackness, far away to the south. Another and another appeared, until the sky was crisscrossed with them.

"Look," gasped Milliken, at last, "the searchlights! The gang is over Zeebrugge!"

"The hell with them," retorted Buzzell, not looking up. "They could be over Times Square and I wouldn't care."

Amid the slowly waving beams of whiteness, a tiny little pin-point of color appeared, far up in the sky. More and more appeared, until suddenly the air seemed filled with them. Milliken, watching them abstractedly, knew that the anti-aircraft gunners were busy, that his comrades were flying amid screaming bits of shrapnel and not finding life pleasant.

Weakly he climbed out of his cockpit and searched with a groping foot for the stirrup on the outside of the fuselage. No sense in staying where they were until they died of seasickness or until they were picked up by a homeward-bound U-boat.

"Where you going?" asked Buzzell, indifferently.

"Going to see what's the matter with the engine."

"Wait a minute!"

Milliken hesitated, but Buzzell was unmistakably sick again and the other scrambled across the lower wing and began to climb out on the engine bed.

Buzzell's voice, a little stronger now, followed him.

"Want a drink?"

"What kind of drink?" asked Milliken.

"Cognac, you sap!"

Milliken made his way back to the careening wing with astonishing agility.

"I always keep a couple of bottles stowed away in the locker against just such an emergency," explained the pilot, a note of pride in his voice. "Drink it easy, now. We may be here all night."

But the other was past hearing. The smooth, potent liquor slipped down his throat in a series of large, satisfying gulps. He gasped, shook the involuntary tears out of his eyes and then, as he felt the impact of the stuff in his stomach, looked somewhat astonished. He handed the bottle back to Buzzell, who grinned.

"I'm not seasick any more," he said, thoughtfully, "but I feel as though I had been hit by a ten-inch shell."

He sat down for a moment on the wet, slippery wing. Then he stood up and took a deep breath.

"Best seasick remedy I ever saw," he affirmed enthusiastically. "Take a good swig and pass the bottle back to me."

As he watched Buzzell follow his advice, he suddenly became conscious of a dull, rumbling sound which had been shaking the still air for some minutes, like the distant mutter of a thunderstorm. He had forgotten the raiding squadron of which he had so recently been a member.

THE sky to the southward was ablaze with searchlights and exploding archie. The Germans were tossing up their box barrage with zest and abandon. This was, Milliken knew, an almost vertical picket fence of anti-aircraft shells set to burst at varying heights.

From a thousand feet to ten or twelve thousand, those bursts constituted an almost impenetrable barrier. Milliken was glad he wasn't flying through it. He reached for the bottle and drank heartily. He was feeling better now. Very much better.

"I wonder why we haven't heard any of the bombs explode?" he asked, passing the bottle back.

Between drinks Buzzell studied the distant display of fireworks.

"Yeah," he agreed, "we ought to be seeing some blazing buildings by now. And you can see the explosions of our bombs from a lot farther away than this."

The aërial display seemed to be gradually moving away from the city. Suddenly the anti-aircraft ceased fire, but the searchlights projected upward as before.

"Look," pointed Milliken excitedly. "Those searchlights are following a dog fight! The Halberstadts are jumping the gang! And there's the skipper's Very light. Do you suppose they've driven the squadron away?"

"Seems like it," agreed Buzzell between gulps. But his voice held no tinge of regret. "Serves them good and right for going off and leaving us down here all alone."

"What did you expect them to do?"

"Well, they might have done something."

"You're having a rush of words. I'm going to see if I can do something with that motor, and I'd better get at it now. If that liquor keeps on delivering, I'll be seeing two engines in a few minutes and will be trying to fix the one that isn't there."

"I'm beginning to feel pretty good myself," admitted the pilot, his voice sounding much stronger. "A couple more drinks like the last ones and I'll be swimming ashore to take Zeebrugge to pieces with my two hands. Boy, howdy!" He laughed immoderately.

"Shut up, you're shaking the whole plane," admonished Milliken. "Got a pair of pliers up there? I think there are a couple of paving bricks or a bucket of sand, or something, in the carburetor."

"I've got some emergency tools in the side pocket here," replied the pilot cheerfully, "if I can only find the pocket. You better come up here and have a little snort while I'm hunting for it."

Milliken did. Then, armed with the pliers, he c l u n g, monkey-like, to longeron and stay wire while he did things to the carburetor. The pilot, feeling chipper as a cricket, shouted blasphemous encouragement.

ASHORE, the fireworks had long since died down to nothing. One by one the searchlights disappeared. But if the two naval aviators noticed that they were all alone in a world of utter blackness, they did not seem to mind. Quite the contrary.

Buzzell tossed the empty bottle overboard and opened another by thumping it against the padded edge of the cowling. The work went rather slowly, for what with the violent rolling and pitching of the ship, the frequent stops for nourishment and this and that, there were many interruptions. But at last Milliken stood on the wing beside the pilot's cockpit, the job completed.

"That's that, you old souse," he said. "Let's go."

"All right," agreed the other. "Where, back to the station?"

"I suppose so. Still, it sort of seems as though we ought to drop those bombs somewhere."

Buzzell considered the problem for some minutes.

"Damn right, old man," he said brightly. "The skipper wanted 'em dropped on Zeebrugge. He's a good old sport and we'll do it for him. Here's where we pop the Hun in the eye. Stand by!"

Milliken scrambled awkwardly to his office. The compressed air starter churned and churned until at last the engine kicked over, popped and burst into full-voiced action.

The plane forged ahead through the water, throwing up tremendous sheets of cold spray as she cut through one wave after another. As her speed increased, she leaped from one wave to another, smacking down upon each with spine-jarring jolts.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" shrieked Milliken, in high good humor.

The impact of pontoons against rollers lessened in force as the lumbering ship picked up speed. She flipped the tops off several whitecaps, missed the next, tapped another and was off, skimming just over the reaching wave crests like a frightened duck.

Milliken's feet danced a clog on the floor. This war was not so bad after all. It had its little compensations. Off to tweak the enemy's tail, eh? Whoops!

Instead of turning out to sea in or-

der to get altitude before attacking the town, Buzzell turned the nose of the fast-flying seaplane straight toward land.

After some consideration, Milliken approved of the course. That was the way to do it. Surprise 'em. The Hals would have gone home. The last thing the Jerries would expect would be an enemy plane thundering alone just over their roof tops.

Of course, there would be machine guns to worry about, but Buzzell would be flying well under the lowest of the archie bursts. Only a direct hit would bring them down.

Good boy, Buzzell! Long head on him. Milliken found himself glowing with warm friendship for his pal. He longed to slap him on the back and tell him what a hell of a good fellow he was. There were too few guys like good old Buzzell in this world!

Milliken found himself waiting for the first searchlight, wishing the Jerries would turn it on so that he might spot their objective. He almost wished the Halberstadts would appear. Feeling the way he did, he could shoot the eye out of a gnat at three hundred yards.

AH! Where there had been nothing but blackness ahead, there suddenly appeared two blue-white beams of incandescence, so solid-looking that he hoped Buzzell would not fly into them, lest the plane crash to bits against their dazzling sides.

A third searchlight and a fourth. The sky ahead seemed full of them. Far, far up in the sky a splash of crimson and yellow flame stabbed the darkness. Then there were scores of the bursts, the lowest well above the low-flying raider.

In the reflection of the searchlights in the black water below, Milliken could see the curving, scythe-like mass of the famous Zeebrugge mole, which protected the entrance to the canals. As he looked, it spurted flame from dozens of machine guns and archies. He watched the phenomena with interest, hardly realizing that those knife points of fire were, every one of them, aimed at him.

At two hundred feet the seaplane cut across the artificial harbor behind the mole. In the instant that they crossed the breakwater, they flew through a maze of thin, luminous lines, all straight as rules.

Milliken regarded them in surprise. Not until they had almost reached the inner edge of the harbor did he identify them as tracers from large-caliber machine guns.

"Now, oldtimer," he said aloud, "here's where we lay our eggs. If we drop 'em in the proper nests, we'll cackle all the way home."

They were passing directly over a narrow strip of land separating the harbor from a large rectangular basin in which, he knew, the submarines were refitted for their raids upon Allied shipping.

"Let's go," he muttered. "Lay 'em in a straight line and we'll do the job with neatness and dispatch."

Methodically he jerked the ring. One, two, three. Then he looked back over the tail to watch the result. Nothing happened. Below were only the flaming mouths of the guns which were trying to knock him out of the air.

He pulled the ring once more and quickly popped his head over the side. He should have been able to see the egg-shaped bomb as it dropped, following the ship for an appreciable time before it nosed down and swung to the

ground in a graceful parabola. But he saw no falling bomb.

Buzzell looked around, an expression of irritation on his face. Milliken leaned toward him, cupped his hands and shouted: "Bomb release blooie!"

The pilot understood, and his face went black. Then his head disappeared. In another moment he was leaning far back over the turtledeck, passing the pliers back to the observer.

"Fix it!" he shouted above the roar of the engine, the reverberating bark of the artillery and the whistling shrieks of upward-bound shells.

MILLIKEN, dubious, looked overside into the inferno. From every side came the vivid points of flame from anti-aircraft. The intermittent blinking of machine guns seemed to dot the entire surface of the earth.

The seaplane was over the turning basin, now, and the flyer could look straight down upon the concrete arches beneath which snuggled the needle-shaped U-boats. The whole sheet of water in the rectangular pool shimmered with the reflection of gunfire from its banks.

Milliken could see the curiously foreshortened figures of men, who ran this way and that, aimlessly, like ants whose nest has been trodden upon. He repressed a sudden impulse to spray them with steel from his own machine gun. No. Killing a few Jerries wasn't important. The subs were his objective.

The seaplane swam straight into the beams of a searchlight. In the next moment three other lights had swiveled over and focused their blinding rays upon the solitary target.

Milliken blinked and tried to shade his eyes. Every inch of oil-streaked fabric, every wire and strut was gleaming in blue-white light. Nothing else existed but this dazzling thing of wood and linen and wire. He could no longer see the ground, nor the shell bursts above. There was just the ship and the two men, the focal point of all this hellishness.

But there was that bomb release to fix. Light radiating through the linen of his cockpit enabled him to see that the release wire was intact. It led straight down through the floor to the gadget slung beneath, where the six bombs hung on their slide between the coffin-shaped pontoons. So the trouble was below, eh?

Unsnapping the patent buckle of his safety harness, he stood up, bracing himself against the wind stream from the propeller. Upright, he discovered that the ship was bucking and tipping violently as she careened through the churned-up air.

But he was feeling fit for anything. His right leg weighed a ton as he lifted it over the edge of the cockpit. The wind plucked at his clothing with a million fleecy fingers. He became aware, for the first time, that he had forgotten to don his coveralls at the take-off. His new forestry green uniform would be ruined by grease from wires and fittings. Well, it couldn't be helped now.

Gripping a strut, he cautiously lowered himself to the rounded surface of the after end of the pontoon. Wow! The wind was strong! Why didn't that dizzy ape, Buzzell, keep her steady?

He inched his way around a cluster of struts and at last reached a place directly under the lower wing where he could see the bomb mechanism, clearly outlined in the intense glare of the lights. The first bomb was tightly wedged in the release. He reached out,

pliers in hand, to pry it loose, when he suddenly jerked back as though he had seen a live rattler coiled there.

Right beside the release had suddenly appeared a smoking, sulphurous straight line, which disappeared in the linen belly of the fuselage. Machine gun bullets! He had almost forgotten the row below.

The tracer swept back and disappeared astern, but he bent down and examined the neat row of bullet holes which it had left in passing. Then he grinned to himself as he began to tinker with the bomb release.

"Baby! If those bullets had moved ahead instead of astern, they'd have made old Buzzell's cushions pretty warm!"

THEN he discovered the trouble. The thing was jammed where the wire operated the trigger. He pried lustily with his pliers.

Click! A bomb dropped out of its rack, floated down past the pontoons, turned in the air and passed out of sight below. That was good, but he would have to remain there on that cold, slippery perch, prying each one loose, for he could see that the release wire was still jammed.

He looked down. They were over the outskirts of town now. No use dropping the bombs to help Jerry with his spring plowing. The plane bucked as the bomb detonated, not far astern.

The cognac still burned warmly in Milliken's stomach. He had never felt more fit. He worked his way back toward the trailing edge of the wing and peered up between the crack between the panel and the side of the cockpit, above.

Buzzell was looking down. Milliken motioned back toward the town. The pilot nodded and put the ship in a vertical bank to return to the scene of action.

When he leveled out again, Milliken turned back to crawl to the bomb release. But something stopped him with a jerk. A pontoon fitting had caught in his waist band. He could feel its hard point sticking into his spinal column.

He twisted and turned, gasping as his breeches tightened up like a corset. He reached around with his free hand to untangle the thing, but the weight of his body held the twist in the fabric as unyielding as iron.

He dared not release his left hand. The wind would have whipped him off the smooth pontoon like a feather. He wriggled, perspiring, while his breeches grew as taut as leather.

He glanced below. Then his eyes opened wide. Slowly, lazily, a chain of blazing balls—green, yellow and orange—was floating up toward him. Flaming onions!

They rose slowly, yet they seemed bound to catch the plane in mid-flight. He thought he could feel the heat of them as he crouched there, impaled by the fitting.

He started, convulsively, to move away from the spot where they seemed certain to strike. They passed out of sight behind the fuselage, as they continued their soaring flight into the sky.

Milliken lurched and almost fell. He gripped the strut with both hands. He was free! The pressure on his stomach and waist was no longer squeezing the breath out of him. He reached down with one hand and explored cautiously.

To his horror he discovered that his forestry-green breeches were ripped for the entire length of the right leg seam, from waist band to waist band. They were fluttering loose, standing

straight out into the wind like a banner. And under the snapping of the fabric, the left leg seam was slowly, but inevitably, parting.

He reached out and tried to gather in the trailing portions, but it was like trying to furl a flag, one-handed, in a gale. The wind caught in a fold, snapped the cloth out of his hands, and, lo, the other seam had gone.

The two halves of his garment blew giddily in the breeze, held in place only by the buttons around his calf, where they fitted snugly into his cordovan puttees. He stood there, paralyzed, unconscious of the volcano of flame and steel which seethed around him.

The roar of the motor died to a mutter.

"Hey, Milliken," came Buzzell's anxious voice, "where the hell are you?"

"Down here," shrieked the other. "I've lost my pants!"

"You're drunk!" retorted the pilot. "Drop those eggs."

HIS brain in a whirl, Milliken looked down. The plane, with engine roaring again, was hurtling across a cluster of low stone warehouses, the first of a series of which were snuggled close to the turning basin.

Jamming his pliers into the release mechanism, Milliken loosed bomb after bomb, until all five had trundled off the rack and dropped out of sight.

Stiff and strained, he pulled himself back to his place on the after edge of the pontoon and looked below.

The air itself was a very maelstrom of tracer, searchlights and more of the horrible flaming onions. Slightly above, shrapnel flickered and winked. Never had he known such noise.

Slightly astern, a tremendous fountain of fire leaped up into the pulsing air.

The first bomb!

Another, in a straight line between the stern of the plane and the first explosion, flung an ever-mounting spearhead of crimson into the night.

The next burst squarely on top of the long granite warehouse which faced the basin. Scarcely had the jagged hole appeared in the slate roof when a gust of flame blew out the front wall. The entire building folded up like a pasteboard box and disintergrated in a billowing mass of swirling flame.

The warehouse next to it suddenly seemed to expand like an inflated bag. Then it, too, became a caldron of fire, from the center of which long streaks of sparks fizzed out like a Fourth of July sparkler, causing new fires wherever the dots of flame landed.

The next bomb fell on the wide cobblestoned street which bordered the pool. Milliken, watching the devastation, saw a little group of men, a hundred feet away from the burst, drop and lie very still.

Then, as the seaplane plunged across the reddening water of the basin, he saw the concrete arches of the submarine shelter vanish amid an uprush of blinding flame. Massive chunks of splintered masonry whirled lazily into the air, falling far out into the pool, which was now a welter of little fountains of leaping water.

That was the last bomb.

Milliken was suddenly cold and tired. He became conscious again of the fabric which whipped and tore at his legs. Time and time again he attempted to haul in the cloth, but as soon as he had it secure in a ball and tried to ease his way around strut, it would instantly snap out of his hands again and wave astern as before.

Let it flap, then, damn it, he'd climb to the cockpit and gather himself together at leisure.

He crawled out from under the wing and, standing for a moment, bracing himself to crawl up on the trailing edge, he stared, puzzled, at a burst of tracer that came from the side, instead of from the ground.

Instinctively his eyes followed the tracer back to its source and then he dropped to one knee. He was looking straight at a Halberstadt, diving to the attack from the starboard side!

He scrambled up on the wing, straddled five feet of space to the toehold in the fuselage and began to crawl into his cockpit. He gasped as he felt himself violently jerked from the rear. The fluttering cloth had again snagged somewhere.

So there he was, one foot within the cockpit, the other dangling over two hundred and fifty feet of hell-swept air. To add to his troubles, Buzzell, having seen the attacking Halberstadt, was kicking the plane about, dodging the probing line of tracer.

THE archie and machine gun fire from the ground had ceased, lest the gunners bring down their own flyer, but the scene was amply illuminated by the searchlights which still impaled the seaplane in their beams.

Milliken, cursing and red in the face, reached one hand behind him and tugged at the rigid cloth. The enemy, after zooming over the seaplane, had reversed and was diving again to the attack.

Milliken redoubled his frenzied efforts. Now he'd be shot down like a tethered bird or, worse still, the undefended seaplane would be forced to earth and he would be taken prisoner. That was a sweet thought—a prisoner of war, without any pants!

Fascinated, he followed the Jerry's diving course. The German swooped down, banked, not fifty feet away and looked straight up at the Yank ship. Then, instead of completing the maneuver, which would have brought his gun to bear on the seaplane, he sheered away, turned, and, with his superior speed, overhauled her from astern.

In half a minute he was abreast of them, staring at the raffish-looking observer through his goggles. Then, deliberately, he shoved his goggles up over his forehead and stared again.

Suddenly his face broke into a broad grin. Milliken, with hot blood pounding at his temples, shook his fist at the German, who waved, replaced his goggles and swerved away to get into position for a dive.

With the frenzy of despair, Milliken clung to the cockpit wall with his knees, reached behind with both hands and tore the fabric loose. Part of it followed him as he fell into his cockpit. The rest, released, snapped away into the night.

"Laugh at me, would he!" muttered the harassed observer as he swiveled his Lewis gun around. "It'll be the last laugh he'll have! I got to bring him down. I'd never let myself get taken alive, no sir!"

Their wings shimmering in the silvery rays of the searchlights, two more Halberstadts appeared from the south. The first was coming in now.

Milliken met him with a long burst. He swerved out of range.

The Yank, glancing at the two enemy planes, waited for the other to resume the attack. That was the baby he would like to bring down. Then he was too busy to care. All three were

upon the Yank ship at once and he fired steadily, methodically, trying to hold them off.

In a moment's breathing space he glanced below. They were well beyond the mole now. Buzzell was heading out to sea, his engine wide open, kicking and twisting her as he might, but putting everything the old ship had to getting away.

BUT those three Halberstadts seemed like a dozen. With odds like that they were taking no unnecessary chances. No need to. If they played the game warily they'd run the Yank out of ammunition long before they sighted the harbor of Souilly-sur-mer. If they didn't shoot her down first, which seemed more than likely.

Back and forth, up and down those darting little planes dashed, while Milliken fired short bursts at them whenever they came within range. A chunk of his padded cowl, as big as an orange, vanished under his eyes. Close, that.

A glowing line of tracer passed between the two cockpits, close to Buzzell's helmet. He mustn't forget old Buzzell. Must keep those three-to-one birds away from him.

He crouched behind his gun butt, waiting for the reappearance of that bird who had so nearly crocked him.

Suddenly one of the Hals floated straight into his ring sight. The gun butt began to dance and to vibrate before he realized that he had squeezed the trigger. Straight along that blunt fuselage the tracer ate its way. The nose of the Jerry ship dropped. She went into a dive. Milliken did not see her again.

But there were only two more drums left. As he placed one of them upon his gun he realized that he was about through. Well, there was one comfort; when he fell, it would be in the water. No one would be likely to find him in so informal a uniform.

Half a drum gone. He was saving every shot, now.

Suddenly the two Hals veered in their course and flew about uncertainly. With a roar that could be heard even over the pounding of the seaplane's engine, a huge Tellier boat, spitting fire from three guns, swept into sight, looking as big and formidable as a battleship.

In the next instant, the Germans were gone. The flying boat thundered after them, though her pilot must have known that the Hals could fly three feet to his two.

Buzzell cut the engine and nosed down in a flat glide. He turned around in his seat.

"That was the Old Man," he yelled. "Must have come back looking for us."

"The hell with him," replied Milliken morosely. "Full speed ahead. Beat him back to port. I'm going to find some pants."

THE dormitory under the eaves was dark and peaceful. The commanding officer, standing in the doorway with the executive, focused his flash light upon one sleeping face after another. The white beam came to rest upon the placid figures of Ensigns Milliken and Buzzell.

"Yes, they're back, all right," whispered the senior officer.

"Must have sneaked in the other door," replied the executive officer. "I'd have seen them if they'd come in the front."

"What the—"

Commander Stevens's whisper was filled with amazement. His searchlight

had fallen upon the chair at the foot of Milliken's cot. Forestry green tunic was neatly folded over the back. But what had caught the observant officer's eye was a pair of shockingly red breeches, so blindingly scarlet that they were obviously an important part of the dress uniform of a modish French artillery officer.

"I'd give a hundred francs," he said slowly, "to know what happened to those dizzy birds between the time I met them off Zeebrugge and this minute. The plane crews at the quay were all laughing, but no one said a word."

"Why not wake them up and ask?" suggested Lieutenant Wentworth practically.

"Listen, old man," said the commander, turning away. "If you had seen what those two boys did, all alone, to Zeebrugge after the rest of us were driven off, you wouldn't ask a single question. Make out their Paris papers first thing to-morrow morning before I find out something that would make me have to cancel their leave. Yes, sir, I'd give a hundred francs to know—"

His voice dwindled away to nothing as the two officers descended the stairway.

"A hundred francs, hell!" said Milliken, popping up in his bed. "He'd have given a hundred *dollars* to have seen the expression on that Frog lieutenant's face when we stole his pants off him in that dark alley!"

THE END.

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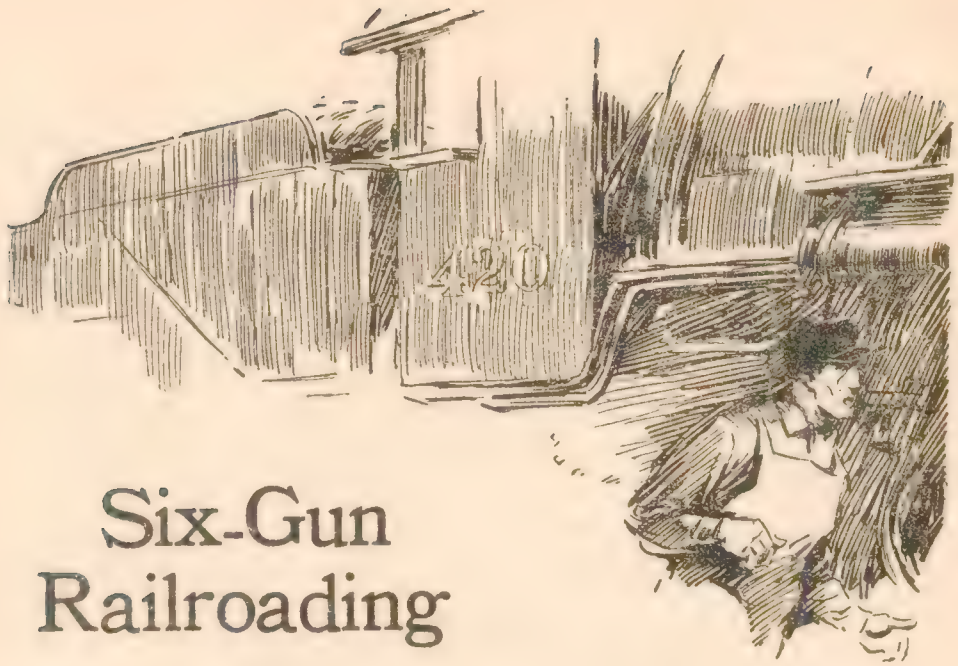
Origin of St. Valentine's Day

FEBRUARY 14 was the feast of Lupercalia in ancient Rome when it was the custom for maidens to put their names in a box for young men to draw, and thereby become their sweethearts for the ensuing year. Gladiatorial combats were a feature of the Lupercalian festivals, and also the execution of the condemned.

The Christian Bishop Valentinus was beheaded on February 14 on the Flaminian Way, the old northern road connecting Rome and Ariminium, now the Adriatic city of Rimini. The martyrdom of Valentinus made quite a stir in Rome, and when the church prevailed over paganism it set aside the date of his death as St. Valentine's Day and substituted the names of saints for sweethearts at the annual drawing; the saint whose name was drawn from the box at the church door became the patron saint of the person drawing it for the year. These names were called valentines. St. Valentine's bones are buried in a Roman church, where a gate now called Porta del Popolo was formerly Porta Valentine.

King Henry VIII in the twenty-seventh year of his reign granted the town of Lynn an annual market day, to be held on St. Valentine's Day. Girls came to buy ribbons and trinkets, and young men to see the girls and dance to the music of roving musicians. Both sexes exchanged gifts, the market became known as St. Valentine's Fair, and from Lynn, St. Valentine's Day spread all over England.

Minna Irving.



Six-Gun Railroading

When Virginia mountaineer feudists began waylaying the railroaders, it scared out the regular engineers—but mountain-born Bob Hatfield didn't scare so easily

By A. LESLIE

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

SABOTAGE.

"PLAIN banditry!" sputtered General Manager "Jaggers" Dunn.

"Yes," agreed Superintendent Harley, "this is serious. Putting the Pond Fork work train in the ditch is going too strong. So long as they contented themselves with trivial annoyances—"

"Trivial annoyances?" roared old Jaggers. "And do you call putting a dead polecat in my private car a trivial annoyance? Why—"

The Old Man choked with wrath; and it took a lot to silence Jaggers.

Jim Harley smothered a grin, and asked his father-in-law and immediate superior a question.

"What was this business of eggs that Helen spoke of?"

Jaggers let out a furious howl.

"Rotten ones, dozens of 'em! One took me right 'longside the head. A dead polecat inside the car, and rotten eggs on the outside. Such a combination of stinks I never smelled before. And that hussy Helen with her face buried in a pillow, laughing like a hyena, and— Damn you! You're crazy as she is!"

The general manager's face was now a royal purple as he glared in speech-

Hatfield's cold blue eyes searched the hills across the creek

less rage at his uncontrollably mirthful subordinate.

Jim couldn't help it. His wife had told him about the episode of the polecat and the eggs, and the vision his imagination called up of the portly Jaggers, garbed only in a nightshirt and dodging over-ripe hen fruit, was too much for his risibilities. He leaned back in his chair and roared.

It began to appear as if a serious conference would break up in a wallow of hilarity. Even McLarnin, the dour Scotch trainmaster, smiled frostily. But a sobering element was even then approaching. The door opened and admitted John Louden, road foreman of engines for the Mountain Division. Louden's usually cheerful countenance was scowling and worried. Harley took one look and stopped laughing.

"NOW what's the matter, Jack?" Harley questioned sharply.

The road foreman nodded respectfully to the general manager and replied:

"Carney brought the Pond Fork work train in."

"The hell he did!" snorted the superintendent. "Tell that crazy Irishman nobody sent for him and to get back up that creek just as soon as the dispatcher can give him orders."

Louden shrugged. "I told him just that very thing, Mr. Harley."

"What did he say?"

"Told me to go to hell and take the 420 with me, for all he cared. Said he

hired out to run an engine, not to fight lunatics with murder on the brain."

Superintendent James Harley frowned and General Manager J. G. Dunn swore a complicated oath with bright red edges.

"And," continued Louden, "I can't say as I blame him overly much. Remember where the grade curves around that big limestone cliff? Where it's about eighty feet down to Pond Creek?"

The superintendent nodded.

"Well, Carney's got good eyes, and he managed to stop the 420 exactly six inches from where a section of rail had been broken out and replaced with cinders heaped up to look like the iron. He said if it hadn't been for the wind blowing some of those cinders away, and the fact that he was just crawling along and looking for things, the 420 would have done an eighty-foot nose dive into the creek, and the crew with her. He ran back and picked up the work train—he was going to Pond Fork for water—and they put in a new rail. Then Carney cut her loose and came on in to the Junction. He kicked Ham Watson off the east bulldog."

For a moment there was silence. Then Harley spoke again.

"No, I can't say that I blame Carney, either. He's pretty old, and having this happen so soon after being put in the ditch must have shaken him up considerably. Did Watson take the work train?"

"He did not. And that's not the half of it. That preferred Pond Fork run is standing vacant and there's the strangest epidemic of sudden sickness among the extra list you ever heard tell of. Just as soon as the call boy says, 'Pond Fork work train,' Mr. Hoghead suddenly remembers he's not feeling a bit well and can't possibly work right now. We did manage to get a fireman, though: Slim Sallee."

"How about the train crew?"

"Train crew's still up there, all except the head brakeman, and he'll go back. You know it's the engine crew, the hogger in particular, that these bushwhackers keep after. The shots have always been at the engine, on the right side, and it was the engine, running light, they put in the ditch."

"Well," said Harley, "this beats hell!"

General Manager Dunn snorted like a Mikado ten-wheeler on a grade.

"Do you understand what this means?" Jaggers rumbled, pounding the table with a ham-sized fist. "If this branch line is delayed the C. & P. stands to lose thousands of dollars a day. Our contract with the Buffalo people calls for coal moved over that line by the 1st of December. And they'll hold us to the letter; their mines are ready and waiting."

"Well," declared Harley, "you can't build railroad without a work train, and you can't run a work train without an engineer. Looks as if you'll have to run that engine yourself, dad. I'd do it if I could, but I'm no hogger."

"By jiminy, I could do it!" roared Jaggers. "I haven't forgotten how to handle a throttle. But it happens I've got a directors' meeting in Chicago for Thursday, and quite a few things other than the blasted Pond Fork Extension to look after. This matter is up to you, young man; you're superintendent of this division."

THERE was a knock on the door of the trainmaster's office.

"Come in!" yelled Jaggers.

The door opened and a young man entered. He hesitated as if on the point

of retracing his steps. Evidently he had not expected to face this battery of high officials. Jim Harley grinned a welcome and called out genially:

"Come on in, Bob; I suppose you want to see Mr. McLarnin. Don't mind Mr. Dunn and me; we're all railroad men together."

The young man smiled a trifle boyishly and closed the door. He was slightly above middle height, with dark hair, a pleasant face with a rather wide mouth, and a figure whose slenderness belied its strength. His eyes were a peculiarly cold shade of light blue. When he spoke his voice was soft, with a slight drawl that slurred the "u" and turned the "r" into an "h."

"It's about the Pond Fork work train, Mr. McLarnin," he said. "Seems nobody wants it; and I've got promotion papers, you know. I'd like to have that run."

For an instant the four officials stared.

"Well, I'm damned!" exploded the general manager.

Bob Hatfield looked a trifle disconcerted at this reception of his request.

"Of course I understand it's rather irregular," the young fireman began, "but none of the engineers seem to want it and I thought—"

"Just a minute, Bob," cut in Harley. "You understand *why* they don't want it?"

Hatfield's pleasant face seemed to harden and grow gray. Into the peculiar eyes crept a pale light that flickered in their depths.

"Perfectly," he replied quietly.

"And that doesn't make any difference?"

"Not the least."

"All right," barked Harley. "You've got it. Get your engine ready and hit the ball just as soon as your fireman can be called. I'll clear the line for you."

He reached for a telephone as the young fireman nodded his thanks and turned to the door.

"Well, I'm damned," remarked Jaggers for the second time.

"Not a bit of doubt about it," agreed his son-in-law cheerfully.

"What's that?" barked Jaggers.

"Not a bit of doubt about his being able to run an engine," explained Harley innocently. "He's been promoted six months or more."

J. G. looked suspiciously at his handsome son-in-law, opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again to ask a question.

"Who is that lunatic?"

"Bob Hatfield is his name. Old feudist family, I guess. Born in Virginia, not far from this Pond Fork section, but his folks moved west when he was a kid. Came back here a few years ago and got a job firing. Promoted with the last class. Good man with an engine and a pleasant fellow to have around. Doesn't talk much. They say he's bad medicine in a ruckus, though he doesn't look it."

"Hmm," said the general manager. He was thinking of those pale eyes. Jaggers had lived much of his youth in the old West and he remembered men with just such eyes; and he remembered what the old West knew of men with such eyes.

"Does he carry a gun?" he asked suddenly.

Harley grinned. "Ever hear of a Hatfield who didn't?" he countered.

"Hmm," said General Manager Dunn again.

"Weel, that's settled," remarked McLarnin. "And I'm believin' the laddie weel nae be easy t' frighten from his wor-r-rk."

"He'll not," agreed Harley. "Now about those missing carloads of rails—"

The officials lit cigars and resumed their interrupted conference in a better frame of mind.

CHAPTER II.

TO KILL THE HOGGER.

IN the meanwhile, Bob Hatfield was swinging briskly along the main street of the little railroad town that is Coal River Junction. He went to the Railroad Y. M. C. A., ate a hearty supper, got his overalls and torch and headed for the roundhouse.

He found 420 purring contentedly in her stall, a machinist or two puttering about her. Bob oiled around, inspected crown sheet, piston packing and brakes. He looked up with a grin as a voice bellowed a greeting. Slim Sallee's moonlike face peered from the cab window.

"Well, well," bawled the rotund tallow-pot. "How's the old eagle eye? Got a boiler plate vest to wear?"

Hatfield grinned again and went on with his oiling. The fireman's face disappeared and shortly after Bob heard the scrape of his shovel as he cleaned the deck.

Whitey Adams, the head brakeman, strolled up, his lantern looped over one arm and a sheaf of tissues in his hand.

"Here's the orders," he told the engineer. "Run light as Extra 420 to Pond Fork. Nobody headed west on Coal River. There's a couple of drags ahead of us, but they ought to pass Pond Fork before we get there. Operator says to watch out for a flag, though."

Bob took the orders, read them and handed them to the fireman. Ten minutes later the 420 was purring along up Coal River, her stack chuckling musically, her side rods clanking a steady song.

Bob Hatfield leaned out the window, the crisp night air ruffling his black hair, his eyes scanning the track ahead. And as his brain automatically registered the passing signal lights, his mind was busy with the events that had given him his chance at an engine long before his seniority would have, in the ordinary run of things, entitled him to sit on the right-hand side of a cab.

The great C. & P. was building railroad in many places. The Pond Fork Extension was but one of the numerous lines creeping into the hills to tap new coal territory.

The Buffalo Coal Company was opening up a new field at the head of Pond Creek Valley, and planned to move thousands of tons a day. Already its tipples were built, tunnels run and power in. The mines were waiting until the Pond Fork Extension should push its tracks the dozen miles that separated it from Buffalo, the company's town at the head of the little valley. The C. & P. was under contract to furnish cars on this extension by the 1st of December, and there was plenty of time to build those few miles of railroad—under ordinary circumstances. But circumstances bade fair to be other than ordinary. Because of the Hodges.

There were four of the Hodges and they owned, or thought they owned, the most of Pond Creek Valley.

Old Arnold Hodges and James G. Dunn had been friends when neither of them was old. They had ridden herd on the same Western plains and had fought together against common enemies. Then they had quarreled.

Later, each had come East again.

Hodges had gone back to the hills where both of them were born, and there he lived the simple life of a well-to-do hillman. Royalties from coal lands brought him considerable money, but didn't change his mode of life. Nor did it change the lives or the ideas of his three stalwart sons. They loved the hills and they stayed in them.

Jim Dunn had gone in for railroading, and had invested his money wisely in the then struggling C. & P. Now he was general manager of the great trunk line and its heaviest stockholder. He was a power in the land and he had almost forgotten his one-time friend.

But Arnold Hodges hadn't forgotten. He still held anger in his heart against Dunn; and when the C. & P. wanted to build a branch line up Pond Creek, old Arnold fought the project tooth and nail. He spurned all offers. He didn't want a railroad in his valley and he didn't intend to have one.

But railroads have a way of their own in such matters. The C. & P. took its right of way through Pond Creek Valley by power of eminent domain, paid, or tried to pay, Arnold Hodges what the courts adjudged a fair price, and proceeded to build railroad.

FOR awhile the matter appeared settled. Then Arnold Hodges, his sons, and his clan got busy. They proceeded to make life miserable for the C. & P. in a number of ways. Tools and material disappeared mysteriously. Sleeping and kitchen cars were raided and their contents destroyed. And dozens of other things were done to make the days interesting for the road-builders.

The C. & P. sputtered, and sent railroad detectives to arrest the vandals. The detectives didn't have any luck; there was nobody to arrest. They were morally certain that the Hodges were guilty, but moral certainty isn't evidence that stands up in court.

The detectives patrolled the right of way, and things continued to happen mysteriously wherever they were not. The crowning insult was offered when General Manager Dunn made an inspection trip. One night a dead skunk, ripe and redolent, was heaved into his private car. The G. M. felt the need of air and went hurriedly to seek it. His appearance on the vestibule platform was the signal for a barrage of most ancient eggs, a number of which took effect upon his august person. General Manager Dunn was somewhat irritated.

But in the meantime the C. & P. continued to build railroad. Then suddenly the Hodges, or whoever it was, changed their tactics. A reign of terror began. The patrolling "bulls" had their hats lifted from their heads by passing bullets. Shots were fired through the cab of the work train engine, the missiles coming closer to the engineer with each recurrence of the outrage. The attackers could shoot, and it was plain to anybody that they could hit the hogger any time they felt like it. They were just serving notice, or running a royal bluff. It did not comfort the engineers, that knowledge.

Then came the thing that awoke the railroad men to the seriousness of the situation. The work train engine, ambling around a curve suddenly, went nose-first into the ditch. Somebody had deflected the track down the low embankment. The members of the crew were jolted up considerably but not hurt.

A wreck train put the 420 back on the rails, and the veteran Carney vowed with many Irish oaths that he

wouldn't give up the run for all the hill-billies in the State. Two days later he had received the fright that made him change his mind, when he had so nearly run his engine onto that "rail" made of heaped cinders.

THIS last was what Bob Hatfield was thinking about as Whitey Adams threw the switch of the Pond Fork Extension that night. He continued to think about it as the 420 rumbled along behind its headlight's glow, beneath the giant limestone cliffs that frowned over rushing Pond Creek.

It was still dominating his mind when he jerked to attention, and desperately shut off the throttle, threw the 420 into reverse, and grabbed the brass handle to throw her into "the big hole." The purring exhaust was stilled, and air screamed through the brake valve port.

The 420's front steps crunched against that murderous bowlder as the engine jolted to a stop. On one side was the bleak limestone cliff; on the other, a sheer drop of fifty feet to the swirling water of the creek.

Slim Sallee swore vividly, and brakeman Whitey Adams echoed his sentiments. The engineer said nothing, but his lips set in a grim line. He lighted a torch and descended to inspect the damage. He had just reached the front of the engine when the torch flew from his hand and slammed smoking against the cliff. From across the dark water sounded the spiteful crack of a rifle.

Bob Hatfield whirled, in his hand a long black gun. Where it came from neither Sallee nor Adams could have told. For long minutes Hatfield's cold blue eyes searched the loom of hills across the creek. Then with a swift gliding motion the big gun slid back into its shoulder holster. The young hogger turned to where the tallow-pot and shack crouched beside the engine.

"Give me your torch, Slim," he said.

Sallee handed him the torch, which Slim had hastily extinguished when the rifle cracked. The engineer shoved the smoldering wick against a hot coal that glowed dully on the edge of the ash pan. A bright flame flared up.

"Hey," howled the tallow-pot, "douse that darn thing! Do you wanna get us all killed?"

Hatfield did not answer. He strode to the front end of the engine and calmly proceeded to examine the obstruction. The fireman and brakeman crouched lower beside 420's drive rod and said things that smelled of sulphur. Fearfully they glanced at the black forest across the creek.

But the sullen hills were silent. No movement disturbed their dark peace. No long rifle belched death. Hatfield turned to his companions. "We can get a chain around this rock and snake it off the track," he said. "Come on and get busy. There won't be any more shooting to-night. Whoever did it meant business, and they figured they got me when the torch flicked out. Then they highballed—the natural thing to do. Get a chain off the tank, Whitey."

CHAPTER III.

POOL SHOTS—AND OTHERS.

THE C. & P. was building railroad again. Steadily the twin steel ribbons crept deeper and deeper into the hills. The 420 lurched along the bumpy new track, shoving cars loaded with ties, rails, fish-plates, and the hun-

dred and one things needed by the road builders. Twice each day she ran back to Pond Fork for water, and always her young hogger sat with his overall jumper swinging open, his right hand never far from the black butt of his big Frontier Colt.

But nothing happened. The days spun by uneventfully. The C. & P. continued to build railroad. Bob began to wonder if he would be allowed to hold this preferred run much longer. Daily he expected some older hogger to "kick him off."

But perhaps the veterans were a trifle ashamed of the timidity they had shown, or perhaps they figured this was just the calm before the storm. Anyway, Hatfield continued to sit on the right-hand side of 420's cab. Slim Sallee said the Hodges must have gone West.

Then in an unexpected manner the enemy struck.

Pond Fork wasn't much of a town, but there were a couple of pool rooms there, a restaurant or two, a picture show, and a hall where dances were held on Saturday nights. And Saturday nights usually found many of the road builders in the pool rooms or the dance hall. They would take the railroad motor car, hook a couple of trailers on behind, and *putt-putt* gayly over the twenty-odd miles to town, usually getting back to camp just about in time for breakfast.

Hatfield, Sallee, and Adams, being young, single and feeling the need of diversion after a week of steady work, always arrived in town with the rest of the bunch. There they danced with the rosy-cheeked girls of the little mining town, or squabbled amiably over endless games of pool. Occasionally they indulged slightly in a pale liquid manufactured secretly back in the hills and frowned on by the book of rules.

Railroad men are clannish, and the three usually kept to themselves. The miners and the few hillmen who happened to be loafing in the pool room seldom intruded their presence. So it was rather surprising when two tall men clad in dark clothes asked permission to join their game. Hatfield glanced keenly at the hillmen, but courteously welcomed them, explaining that it was a sociable game and they played for only small stakes.

"That's agreeable with us, suh," assured the older of the two. "We jes' wanted a little fun t' pass the time."

As the game started, a third man, bearing a marked resemblance to the two players, entered and took a chair where he could watch the contest.

THE hillmen played silently and well, and Hatfield was beginning to enjoy the sport thoroughly when suddenly he had a feeling that something unusual was on foot. Casually he glanced about and noted with surprise that the games at the other tables had ceased and the players were drifting from the big room, casting furtive glances in the direction of the lone remaining game.

He darted a look at the counter where lunches were served. The proprietor was there, his face queerly strained and beaded with sweat, his hands moving aimlessly over the oak slab. His eyes met those of the engineer, and Bob seemed to sense in them a desperate attempt to signal a warning.

The engineer essayed a difficult shot, missed, stepped back and chalked his cue. He glanced up just in time to intercept a look pregnant with meaning that passed between the two hillmen.

Carelessly Bob loosened the upper buttons of his overall jumper. The taller hillman's coat had swung back as he leaned over the table, and Bob had distinctly seen the outline of a holstered revolver.

A few more rounds of shots, and the third hillman, the one in the chair, stood up, yawned and moved slightly toward one end of the table. Whitey and Slim were standing by the cue rack, chatting together and awaiting their turn to play. The hillman missed a bank, and it was Bob's shot again. The hogger made a run, missed, and began to collect his balls from the pockets. He picked up the last one and was stepping toward the rack with it when the tallest hillman spoke.

"Pardon, suh, but that's my ball."

"You're mistaken," answered Hatfield, dropping the ball into the rack. "I made that ball on my second shot."

"Meaning, suh, that I am a liar?"

"Meaning that I'm onto your game, and it won't work! Get going, if you've got the nerve!"

"What the—" gasped Sallee.

Thundering in the inclosed space, a gun roared. Another shot slashed through the cigarette smoke, and was answered as by an echo.

"*Drop it!*"

Bob Hatfield's voice cut the silence like a knife. The yawning muzzle of his smoking Colt menaced the third hillman. The gun which that mountaineer had just drawn clattered to the floor, and he stepped back a pace, raising his hands in the air.

"You win, suh," he acknowledged.

Hatfield's cold eyes probed the dark, steady gaze mercilessly, then flicked to where a tall figure lay sprawled on the floor, and to the other man leaning dazedly against the cue rack, blood dripping from his right hand. The man on the floor stirred, groaned and sat up. A hand fumbled with his temple. He gazed at the blood on his fingers. Bob spoke again.

"I just barked you. I should have drilled you dead center. Get on your feet, and then get the hell out of here, the three of you—you damned would-be murderers!"

The unwounded man gazed fixedly at the engineer for a moment. Then his eyes fell, and an angry wave of color darkened his face. He strode to the sitting man, helped him to his feet, and shot a curt command to he of the wounded hand. That individual again stared in a dazed fashion at his bleeding knuckles, shook his head and followed his companion into the night.

Bob Hatfield holstered his Colt, walked over, and picked up the gun he had shot out of the mountaineer's hand. Then he retrieved the artillery left by the other two. He turned to the still speechless fireman and brakeman, his hands full of choice specimens of the skill of Messrs. Smith & Wesson.

"How much for the lot?" he grinned.

Slim Sallee let out a long whistle and found his voice.

"Man, did that gun grow in your hand? I never saw you draw it at all! The big jigger had his lined with you 'fore your hand even moved. And you shot 'fore he could pull the trigger!"

Hatfield smiled and said nothing.

CHAPTER IV.

AMBUSH.

THE air was crisp and cool, mellowed golden by a slight haze that clung to the towering slopes of the hills. A purplish haze where the pines stood like plumed chiefs. Tinged

with scarlet where the maples and crabapples were fiery splotches.

It was a day that made one glad to be alive, and Slim Sallee sang blithely as 420 rumbled along toward Pond Fork in quest of a tank of water and a shovelful of coal. Whitey Adams stood in the gangway, where he could look across the foam-flecked waters of Pond Creek to the gayly dressed hills.

Bob Hatfield watched the track ahead with a keen eye, stealing occasional glances at the rich beauty of autumnal woodland that loomed against the evening sky. He was at peace with the world and all therein. Even the Hodges.

In fact, he felt that he owed the Hodges a debt of gratitude. Adams and Sallee had wasted no time in broadcasting the story of the previous week's attack in the pool room, and Bob had learned that a certain engineer who had been contemplating using his seniority right to sign up for Pond Fork work train had suddenly changed his mind.

Wham!

Whitey Adams yelled and ducked back out of the gangway.

Boom! Boom! Boom! said 420's stack; Bob had jerked the throttle wider as he instinctively ducked.

Wham! Whe-e-e-e-e!

The second bullet came through the cab window, struck the boiler head at an angle and screamed off somewhere. Bob Hatfield grated an oath as he crouched low in the cab. He dared not take his eyes from the track, for this shooting might be for the very purpose of distracting his attention from something that would wreck the speeding engine.

"Watch around that curve!" he yelled to Sallee as the pony trucks screeched.

They lurched off the tangent and onto the arc of the curve.

"All clear," bawled the fireman. A final bullet thudded against the tank, and then the shoulder of cliff was between them and the unseen marksman. For a quarter of a mile Hatfield let the 420 run, gradually easing off on the throttle. Then he closed it and applied the air.

"Whatcha stoppin' for?" Whitey wanted to know.

Bob shucked off his overalls and jumper and stood in dark clothes whose visibility would be poor against a background of forest. He hitched his holster a little forward and buttoned his coat.

"Take the throttle and run her on into town," he told Sallee. "Get your water and coal, and take your time about getting back. I'm going to have a few words with this shooting gent. I figure he'll take another crack at us on the up trip. There's a shoal right about here, and I aim to get across the creek and surround him."

"I'll go with you," volunteered Adams quickly. "Slim can take the engine in by himself."

Bob shook his head. "No, I don't want you. You'd give the whole thing away. I was raised in these hills. You weren't, and you can't move in the woods without making a lot of noise. He'd hear us coming a mile away. Hit the ball, now."

HE swung down the steps as Sallee opened the throttle. He stood still until 420 chuckled around another curve and out of sight. Then he scrambled down the embankment and picked his way through the shallow water of the shoal.

The undergrowth was dense on the lower slopes, and Hatfield found the

going anything but easy. Higher up, the way would be clearer, but he had to keep the railroad in sight in order to approximate the spot from where the shots had come.

The smokeless powder the hillman used left no tell-tale smudge, but the engineer's keen eyes had caught a glint, just after the second shot was fired, that he felt sure was sunlight flashing from a rifle barrel. He knew just about where he should find the bushwhacker, if his hunch had been correct and the fellow was lying in wait for the engine's return.

Opposite the curve, Bob struck back from the creek. A hundred yards higher up the slope, he resumed his course parallel with the shore line. He moved with the utmost caution now, hand close to his gun, eyes searching the tangle of scrub and rocks. Finally he halted and stood waiting in a dense thicket of hazel bushes.

The cliffs across the stream began to murmur. Steadily the sound grew until he recognized the purring exhaust of a light engine climbing the grade. Hatfield tensed. Nearer came the 420, till she was directly opposite.

Crack!

The watcher started involuntarily. It seemed as if the report had come from directly beneath his feet. He glided forward as the engine's exhaust quickened.

Crack!

Hatfield paused on the edge of a low bank thickly fringed with the hazel bushes. A few feet below his perch and not two yards distant, a dark figure snuggled behind a ridge of rock. Even as the engineer reached for his gun, that rifle cracked a third time.

With sudden resolve Bob shoved the revolver back. Then his long body streaked through the air.

Just as he leaped, the figure turned sidewise and he missed it by inches. The mold broke his fall, and as Bob struck, his hands were reaching for the rifle. A wrench and a twist, and the weapon clanged across the ledge. Bob struck viciously, missed and shot a clutching hand toward the other's throat. Everything was shadowy there beneath the bushes, but his hand reached its mark. He gripped a wrist and twisted sharply. There was a choking gasp, a convulsive writhing, and the figure went limp.

"What the hell?" muttered the engineer. "I barely touched him!"

Cautiously he loosened his grip, fearful of a trick. Then all at once his hands leaped back as from a snake, his eyes widened with incredulous horror.

"Good God!" he breathed.

Swiftly he gathered the unconscious form in his arms and crashed through the brush to the creek. He scooped up drops of the cold water and bathed the face gently, his lips moving in stifled, incredulous oaths the while. After what seemed an eternity the lids fluttered and a sigh escaped the still lips.

Then two big brown eyes opened wide and looked fearfully into the face bending over them. A great sigh of relief welled up from Bob Hatfield's breast. Carefully he lowered the girl's bobbed, curly brown head to a more comfortable position.

"I'M glad you've come to," he began, his white teeth flashing in a relieved, and involuntarily friendly grin. Then he recalled what she had been doing.

"Young lady, you sure can shoot straight," he said sternly. "What the devil—I mean, what's the idea of—"

The girl, staring up into his face, moved a trifle in his arms and gasped.

"You hurt my wrist," she accused, interrupting.

Bob hastily and with concern examined the injured member. The skin had been rasped by his wild clutch and was slightly bruised, but there was no sign of sprain.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But how was I to know you were a girl—shooting at me like that. You plumb ruined the cab window of my engine!"

"Your engine? Then you're—"

"Yes—I'm the man you've been trying to kill. Why in—I mean, why are you, a girl, mixed up in this confounded bushwhacking, anyway?"

"But I wasn't shooting at you. I just shot at the engine. How did you get here, anyway? There's the engine—it just went past."

"I slipped across the creek half a mile below and worked back through the hills."

The girl's face flushed with mortification. "And I never heard you!"

"Well, don't let that bother you," Bob told her. "I've spent lots of time in the hills. I can move without making much noise. Besides, you were listening for the engine. But who are you and what's the big idea of shootin' up my engine?"

A resentful light glowed in the brown eyes as she answered.

"I'm Norma Hodges."

"Oh," said the engineer. "I see."

The girl sat up and began patting her disordered hair into shape.

"You shot two of my brothers last Saturday night and then sent the sheriff to arrest them. They heard he was coming and went back into the hills. Father is old and, besides, he's not well; so I came down here to try and scare your old engine away. Now I suppose you'll take *me* to jail!"

She glared defiantly at him, her red lips pouting, a suspicion of tears in the big eyes. Bob thought the slight tilt of her little nose added immeasurably to the attractiveness of her piquant face. He chuckled and his blue eyes danced as he answered:

"Nope, I'm not going to take you to jail. And I didn't send any sheriff after your brothers. I don't have any truck with sheriffs and informing. But I *am* going to take you home and tell your mother to spank you."

Lightly she leaped to her feet and stood looking down at him. It was when she stood that he noticed how tiny she really was. He decided she couldn't be a day over twenty.

"You wouldn't dare!" she gasped. "My father would shoot you if he knew it was you who wounded my brothers. And I haven't any mother. She died when I was a baby."

Bob Hatfield looked up, his eyes suddenly grave and very tender.

"Sure now, that's too bad." He arose and gazed down at the dark head.

"Come on, little lady. Let's see if we can find your rifle and then we'll start. It's going to be dark in a little while."

THE girl looked up at him for a long minute. Then she bowed her head and turned toward the low ridge behind which she had crouched a few minutes before.

"It's only a couple of miles," she told him as they followed a faint trail that wound up the hillside. "Just over this hill and down into the valley. The road from Pond Fork runs by our place and you can go back to town that way. You can ride my horse and leave him with Lafe Whittaker who runs the pool room. You can ride a horse?"

Bob Hatfield smiled slightly as the memory of certain sunfishing outlaw

bronchos back in Arizona drifted through his mind. "Oh, enough to keep from falling off. You're sure being nice to a fellow who just got through choking you half to death."

Norma Hodges laughed, a merry laugh—like the tinkling of little silver bells, Bob thought.

"I don't believe you choked me at all," she said, "but you certainly frightened me half to death. Did I frighten you when I shot at your engine? You know I wouldn't have shot at you—even before I knew you were so—" She did not finish the sentence.

"Well," he admitted, "I didn't get any fun out of hearing those steel-jackets whang against the boiler. Guess we're about even."

Bob had heard that Arnold Hodges had a comfortable home, but he was rather astonished at the fine old colonial house with its white pillars and set in a beautiful grove of stately oaks. A graveled walk led to the veranda. A colored servant opened the door.

The engineer hesitated at the steps, glancing at his rough clothes and wet shoes. The girl smiled.

"Never mind your clothes," she told him. "Every one around here dresses roughly at times. Look at me—I'm no fashion plate."

Bob looked and thought her close-fitting short skirt, blue flannel shirt and tiny, high-laced boots made as charming a costume as any one could desire.

"I know you must be hungry," she continued, "and I'm starved. We'll have some supper while your horse is being saddled. But if father is at the table, for goodness' sake don't tell him you are a railroad man. He'd give me a terrific lecture after you were gone, if you did. And, please, please don't say anything about what I was doing this afternoon. Tell him you are up here fishing or something, and that I met you last year when I was at school in Richmond. And—goodness gracious! I don't even know your name!"

Bob told her as they entered the hallway. She nodded brightly and left him. The colored servant led him up wide steps to a pleasant room and departed with: "Suppah will be ready in a few minutes, suh."

Hatfield brushed his clothes, washed, straightened his tie and combed his thick black hair. Then he descended the steps to the hall where the girl awaited him.

They entered a big room paneled in black walnut. From beside a snowy table a tall, silvery-haired old man arose.

"Very glad to know you, suh," Arnold Hodges acknowledged his daughter's introduction. "It is a pleasure to have you with us."

He stood with grave courtesy until Norma and her guest were seated, then resumed his chair.

Bob Hatfield enjoyed an excellent dinner, but derived more pleasure from watching the piquant, animated face across the table and listening to her sprightly talk which subtly suggested past acquaintance. Old Arnold spoke seldom, giving most of his attention to the serving of the meal.

THERE was a step in the hall; a deep voice sounded. The girl gave a startled gasp. The door opened and a tall man stepped into the room. About his temples was a white bandage.

For an instant the newcomer stared at Hatfield in incredulous astonishment, then flashed out a big revolver.

Bob sat quietly in his chair, looking coolly into the hot eyes of the young hillman. The girl cried out chokingly.

An icy voice cut rapierlike through the tense air.

"Sidney, put up that revolver! What do you mean by menacing a guest?"

The tall young man's glare never wavered.

"Dad, it's that damned engineer," he growled.

Old Arnold Hodges's eyes widened slightly and took on a frosty glint, but his voice changed not a tone.

"It does not matter if he is Satan, suh; he is our guest and due every courtesy. Also, suh, your language leads me to believe you have overlooked the presence of your sister. You will apologize to her, and to Mr. Hatfield for your actions."

The fire died from the hillman's eyes. He holstered his gun and bowed to Bob.

"My father is right, suh," Sidney Hodges said. "I forgot myself. I beg your pardon, and my sister's."

Bob arose and his bow was as courtly as the other's.

"I, too, am in the wrong," he replied quietly. "I should have told your sister I am a railroad man; then she would not have invited me to her home. I feel that, under the circumstances, I am an intruder. I thank you for your hospitality and will bid you good night."

He was turning to the door to leave the house when the girl's voice stopped him.

"He's saying that to protect me," she cried. "Listen, father, I'm going to tell the truth about it."

The words tumbled out swiftly as she told of the afternoon's happenings. Old Arnold's lips twitched slightly under his white mustache and there was a queer gleam in his eyes as he gazed at the young engineer.

He patted his daughter's shoulder when the tale was finished, then turned to Bob.

"A *gentleman* will always lie, if necessary, to protect a lady," he said. "Good night, suh. Sidney, come with me."

He bowed, turned and walked from the room, his tall son following.

OUTSIDE on the driveway sounded a clatter of hoofs. Bob smiled at the girl and stepped back from the table.

"I expect that is my horse, is it not?" he remarked. "I guess I'd better be going."

"Yes," she breathed, "it would be better. My other brothers must not be far off, and you might meet them. I was awfully frightened just now; Sidney is terrible when he is angry."

Beside the horse which the silent black man held, Bob paused.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

A startled gasp answered him. "Oh, you musn't ever see me again! Father hates your railroad and my brothers hate you."

"And do you hate me, too?" He smiled with an effort.

"I—I—no, I don't hate you. And," she whispered, "do you know, I believe father likes you a little bit, because you wouldn't tell on me. I saw him smile beneath his mustache."

Bob Hatfield laughed gayly as he reached the saddle with a single lithe motion. Suddenly he leaned down and with effortless ease swung the girl up and held her at arms' length, her face on a level with his own. He smiled into the wide, startled eyes.

"And do you like me—a little bit?"

The brown eyes looked bravely into his blue ones and the red lips were

grave and unsmiling when she answered:

"Yes, I like you."

For an instant longer he held her. A swift motion and his lips just touched her dark hair. Then she was on her feet again and the horse was cantering down the driveway, the rider swaying gracefully in the saddle, a very part of the animal.

The voice of the colored servant broke in on the girl's thoughts.

"Lawsy, Missy Norma, but dat young gen'l'man can ride a hoss! An' strong! He picked yo' up like yo' was a chil'!"

Norma was thankful for the darkness that hid her blush.

"You'll not speak of that to my father, Uncle Gabe? You know the young gentleman is a railroader."

"Don' yo' worry 'bout me speakin' anythin', missy. Ol' Gabe got close tongue in his haid. An' even if dat young gen'l'man am a railroader, he's quality, yassuh, he's quality."

"Do you really think so, Uncle Gabe?"

"Huh, chil', Ah knows so. Kain't fool ol' Gabe 'bout quality in white folks. No, suh!"

CHAPTER V.

ORDEAL BY FIRE.

THE portion of the line that paralleled Pond Creek was safely finished without further attacks, and now the new railroad was pushing ahead at a sharp angle to the creek valley proper, running through what was the densely wooded dry bed of an ancient river. Less than five miles separated the end of the steel from where the Buffalo mines were waiting to pour forth their dusky treasure.

No new violence had delayed the construction work and Bob's vague story of a search that resulted in discovering a total lack of ambushed riflemen had been accepted. It appeared that the line to the Buffalo mines would be finished in good time. It was Indian summer, dry and warm with crisply chill nights—p e r f e c t track-laying weather.

Bob Hatfield still held the 420, and hoped to hold her until the new road was completed. Twice during the past two weeks he had seen Norma Hodges. One Sunday afternoon she had come to town in company with the tall, black-browed Sidney. The hillman scowled darkly, but the girl acknowledged Bob's greeting with a dazzling smile that left the engineer in a delicious daze the remainder of the day.

The following Saturday night was marked up in red for Hatfield, for he had actually danced with her twice before her father had come to take her home from the informal and welcome-to-everybody ball sponsored by Pond Fork business men.

Old Arnold had bowed with cool courtesy to the railroad man, and if he was displeased at his daughter's choice of a dancing partner he did not show it by any impolite word or action.

To-day, however, Bob was doing less thinking about Arnold Hodges's daughter than he had been for some time. The reason was twofold. One was the presence on the job of that august and irascible personage, General Manager J. G. "Jaggers" Dunn, who had come up to look things over.

Jaggers rode on the fireman's seatbox in 420's cab, and made caustic remarks whenever he saw something that did not agree with his conception of what it should be—which was often enough. From time to time he looked

from under frosty brows at the young engineer on the other side of the cab, but what he thought he kept to himself.

Once Bob heard him growl, "Just the thing; he deserves it." Bob wondered with a qualm what poor sinner was "goin' to cotch it."

The other reason, the thing that occupied the thoughts of both engineer and official, was the ever-thickening blue haze that shrouded these hills. There was forest fire back in the mountains, and after gazing at the sun glowing so redly in the morning sky, General Manager Dunn had roundly expressed his opinion of the contracting engineer for not having cleared the timber and undergrowth to a safer distance from the right of way. Dunn's anger increased when a faint wind began to blow steadily from the east.

The blue haze was thickening, and there was a tangy smell of burning wood in the air. Jaggers climbed to the top of a load of ties and gazed long and earnestly into the darkening east. Suddenly he called to the work train conductor:

"Load the men and the tools on these flats and pick up the camp cars. Then get the hell out of this blasted jinx-ridden neck of the woods. There's going to be a merry section of Hades going full blast around here within an hour. We'll run back to that siding where the main line leaves the creek, and wait there until the fire burns out or it rains. That fool contractor is going to have about four miles of track to relay, or I miss my guess."

BOB pulled the work train into the creek siding, uncoupled, and ran the 420 back onto the main line so as to have her ready in case the G. M. should want to use the engine. For it was certain now that the fire would burn to the railroad.

The wind was freshening and clouds of acrid smoke rolled down from the hills to the east. The sun was almost smudged out and when the trainmen came out of the kitchen car after having eaten dinner, the early afternoon was a murky twilight and the air was unpleasant to breathe. Bob was enjoying a smoke when he heard a workman calling his name.

"There's a nigger here, says he wants to see you bad," the fellow explained.

At first Bob didn't know the negro. Then he recognized under the sweat and grime the kindly features of old Gabe.

"Gawd in Hebben, Marse Hatfield," gasped the old man, "hab any ob yo'-all seen lil Missy?"

"You mean Miss Norma, Gabe?" questioned Hatfield sharply. "No! Where is she?"

"Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!" moaned the colored man. "Marse Sidney, he drinkin' this mawnin', an' when he drinkin', he plumb bad. He come to me an' say, 'Gabe, saddle mah hoss; I's gwine t' ride up t' the hemlock flats an' shoot dat dam' engineer!' An' 'way he go, lickety-split. When lil Missy come in, Ah tells her what Marse Sid done said. An' she rides 'cross hills by a short cut Marse Sid don' know 'bout, so's t' warn yo'. She's up dere now, right in de way ob all dat fiah, an' Marse Sid didn' go 'tall. Done fell off de hoss, an' come right back home an' go sleep."

For a terrible moment Bob Hatfield stood motionless, his blue eyes cold and hard, his face a gray mask. Then, before the gaping road-builders realized what he was doing, he was in 420's cab. The hiss of watery steam through

the cylinder cocks and the churn of her exhaust brought General Manager Dunn's head out the kitchen car's door.

"What's that crazy fool doing?" Jaggers roared as 420 boomed up the track. "Does he want to knock the heads out of those cylinders?"

Excitedly Whitey Adams explained what had happened, and the old fighter listened, his frosty eyes agleam. When the brakeman had finished the general manager turned to the others and said:

"Gentlemen, there is a *man* in that cab."

He walked over to the main line and stood gazing at the smoke-wreathed hills, as a horseman clattered up to the group and flung out a frenzied question. As Dunn still stood there, a hand touched his shoulder. Jim Dunn turned and looked into the haggard face and tortured eyes of the man who had been his friend. For long minutes neither spoke. Then:

"Arnold, I am sorry," said Jim Dunn. "I have a daughter, and I nearly lost her once; I understand."

Two gnarled hands met in a lingering grip. Anger, enmity, differences—how trivial they appeared now in the presence of death!

PLUNGING like a sunfishing horse, the 420 rocketed through the thickening murk. It was sheer madness to run an engine at such speed over new, partially ballasted track, and Bob Hatfield knew it, but he set his grim lips tighter and widened on the throttle.

He knew now that he loved Norma Hodges more than life itself. And his only chance to save the girl he loved was to beat the fire fiend in this wild race to the end of the new line. The hemlock flats were there, and all this wide section of dense woodland was in the path of the flames roaring westward before the ever-freshening wind.

Norma would make her way to the grade, and there she would be trapped. There was a faint chance that she had turned back when she realized the danger she was facing; but Bob Hatfield knew in his heart she had not turned back. She would dare the menace of the flames to warn him. He put in a fire, leaped back to the seatbox, hooked 420 up a few notches and widened the throttle a bit more.

Now gray ash and bits of firebrands were swirling across the gash cut in the forest by the railroad. The smoke rolled down in clouds, and the engineer coughed continuously as he strained ahead with red, running eyes, fearfully watching for the burst of flame that would signal the way was blocked.

Faster and faster sped the lurching engine, her side rods clanking a wild song, her drivers screeching a protest against the uneven, sun-kinked rails. The east was now a solid bank of writhing smoke, and as Bob caught a glimpse of the hills through a rift in the forest he saw red tongues of flame lick to the summit of a tall pine and burst in a spreading flare of fire.

The 420's exhaust stopped short, black smoke poured from her stack, brake-shoes s c r e a m e d against her drivers. Bob Hatfield swung from the cab of the still moving engine and raced forward.

A figure was stumbling along the track, reeling from exhaustion, clothing stained with gray ash and clay. Bob swept the fainting girl into his arms and tore back to the 420.

"You're safe, Bob, you're safe! I was afraid I would be too late! My horse fell and threw me, then ran away, and I had to walk. Sid's up here to kill you!"

Norma Hodges looked up through her tumbled hair, tears swimming in her eyes. Bob smiled almost cheerfully at her as he placed her on the fireman's seatbox.

"Sid's safe at home," he told her. "Gabe came and told me you were here. I came after you. Now we've got to hustle back before this fire cuts us off. Hang on tight!"

He reversed 420 and started backing along the bumpy track—more slowly now, because an engine cannot back safely at high speed, and the track was very bad.

Thicker and thicker swirled the smoke. The embers were raining down steadily and the ash was drifting in clouds. Hatfield's face grew grimmer as he saw little tongues of flame leaping in the undergrowth that flanked the right of way. There were still three miles to go.

The girl had slipped from her perch and stood leaning against his knee. In her wide eyes was no fear. Bob patted her hand and opened the throttle another notch. Flame was leaping among the pines and hemlocks that lined the track, and the air was unpleasantly hot. The engine was swaying and lurching, threatening momentarily to leave the rails. Under her drivers was a constant grind of crushed embers.

IT happened! With a rending crash a great tree, its branches a welter of flame, fell across the track not a hundred yards ahead of the speeding coal-car. Brakes screaming, the 420 plowed into the obstruction and lurched to a stop, her tank "on the ground."

A wave of stifling heat swept into the cab; the smoke swirled in blinding clouds. The flames of the burning forest were roaring down the wind. Only a few minutes and the narrow railroad gash would be a blistering inferno. To attempt to outrun the fire fiend down that track would be suicide. Another tree thundered to earth not a score of feet from the doomed engine. Little tongues of flame were already running along the creosoted ties.

"Just one chance, and that's a slim one," Bob said quietly. "Come on."

He closed the injector and jerked the fire door open. Then he unhooked the coal gate chains and helped the girl scramble up the sliding coal to the top of the water tank. Unprotected now by the cab walls, the heat seared their skin and tortured their lungs. The engineer raised the cover of the manhole, took the girl in his arms, and placed her feet on the rungs of the ladder inside the tank.

"Down you go," he gasped. "Quick. The water isn't too deep."

The brown head disappeared, and Bob scrambled into the tank. He reached back and drew the cover down, wedging a small lump of coal under it to insure an air supply—such as it would be. Norma was close beside the ladder, the water coming nearly to her shoulders.

"Heavens, but it's cold," she chattered between clicking teeth. "We'll freeze to death if we stay here!"

Bob chuckled grimly, gaspingly. "We'd roast outside. But don't worry. This water 'll warm up only too quickly. I only hope it don't boil. I've no desire to learn how a nine-minute egg feels."

He gave the girl a soaked handkerchief to breathe through, for already smoke was beginning to seep into the tank. The narrow opening beneath the cover was a red glow; evidently the fire was all around them and coming closer.

Five minutes later they had ceased shivering and were ducking their heads beneath the water at short intervals. Hatfield reached up and touched the top of the tank. The iron blistered his fingers. They could hear a muffled roaring punctuated by sharp cracklings. A dull crash and the tank rocked wildly. A tree had fallen across it.

Bob felt a growing doubt as the tank seemed to lurch slightly. If the ties should burn out on one side, the engine might overturn down the embankment. And if it did they were lost. Deprived of their precious water they could not live two minutes.

He began to question if they could live, anyway. The tank top was starting to glow dully in spots, and the refugees crouched low to escape the searing heat that beat down from the iron. Breathing was already acutely painful; their lungs ached and their heads throbbed. Outside, the roaring and crackling grew louder.

Bob drew the girl into his arms and held her close. She sagged against him, her eyes closed. Gently he eased her back until only her lips and the tip of her nose was above water. To do this necessitated exposing more of his own body to the blast from the almost red-hot tank top, but he set his teeth and grimly endured the torture.

Slightly revived, the girl struggled up and drew him farther into the water. But it was small relief; there was no air to breathe, only hot, acrid smoke that ate into their lungs. The top of the tank sagged as another tree crashed across it. A hungry little tongue of flame licked in beneath the cover.

The water suddenly began to lower. The fire must have burned a connecting hose in two—the tank was emptying itself!

Lower and lower sank the water. The man and girl crouched down, dropped to their knees. At last they lay flat on the slimy floor, the swirling liquid scarce covering their bodies. And still the water gurgled through the burned hose. A few minutes and it would be gone, and they would be left to the mercy of the fire.

Only a puddle remained in the tank. It was an empty iron box that fire would melt and destroy—a ghastly sepulcher for the humans who had sought it as a refuge. The two forms on the floor lay motionless. Outside was silence; silence and smoky twilight. Black and smoldering was the line of railroad, twisted rails and charred ties. But the fire fiend had gone. On into the west he roared, leaving behind his trail of devastation and death.

OVER the gaunt, flame-blasted hills in the east peeped a round harvest moon. The wind had driven the smoke clouds toward the west, and the white light flooded through clear air, bathing in silvery radiance a burned and blackened engine that crouched crookedly like some gigantic, stricken beast of prey. Silently it stood, lonely and deserted.

Something was moving on the battered, sagging tank. The manhole cover rose with a creak and clanged harshly. A figure appeared in the black opening. Painfully it struggled forth, clutching to its breast a limp burden.

Burned, smoke-grimed, covered with mud and slime, Bob Hatfield gently wiped the wan face of the unconscious girl with a sodden rag that had been a handkerchief. She stirred slightly under his touch, sighed, her eyes fluttered open.

He stroked her wet hair tenderly

with a blistered hand and held her close. Her arms went around his neck and their lips met in a long kiss.

Far down the blackened right of way lights bobbed. Faint shouts sounded through the night air. Bob reached under his left arm and drew forth a dripping gun. He made sure the barrel was not choked with mud, then fired in the air. Two of three cartridges lived up to their boast of being waterproof. The distant lights bobbed faster, the shouts took on an eager tone.

GENERAL MANAGER J. G. DUNN and Superintendent Jim Harley sat in the trainmaster's private office at Coal River Junction. A knock sounded.

"Come in, damn it!" yelled old Jaggers.

The door opened, and the assistant trainmaster of the Mountain Division entered. Old J. G.'s crusty countenance softened as he greeted the young man whom he had raised to official position just a few days previous.

"Well, Hatfield, what's the trouble?"

"I understand, Mr. Dunn, that we are going to hire quite a few firemen, and that Pond Fork Extension is going to be made a district."

"Yes, we are, and it is. What of it?"

"Well, I have three applicants I would like to have put on."

"All right, if you recommend them and they can pass the examinations. Who are they?"

"My three brothers-in-law," replied Bob Hatfield, opening the door wide. "Come in, boys," he called.

Three tall, dark-eyed men entered and stood quietly gazing at the general manager."

"These boys," said the assistant trainmaster, "are Arnold, Sidney and Wade Hodges. They want to become railroad men."

The general manager and the division superintendent stared blankly at the tall hillmen. Then they stared at Bob Hatfield. Mechanically the G. M. reached for a pad of application blanks.

"Well, I'll be d-d-darned!" It was the mildest oath the astounded Jaggers Dunn had sworn for many a year.

THE END.

A Hard Egg to Hatch

THE tuatara lizard of New Zealand is a strange, sluggish creature, to all appearances much like any other lizard. But it is a "living fossil" descendant and sole survivor of the age of the dinosaurs.

It is freakish in several ways. In its head is a gland similar to the pineal gland in human beings, which the ancient Egyptians called the "third eye" or the "eye of vision." In the tuatara this gland is really an extinct eye, a kind of blind eye, for it contains all the essentials of an eye that can see, but it is covered by a fold of skin and is as useless as an appendix.

The tuatara lays its eggs in April or May and they do not hatch out until eleven months later, the young going through a kind of dormant stage in the egg.

Wyman Sidney Smith.

"I am well guarded," Dominetti warned

John Solomon's Biggest Game

War—unannounced, secret, ruthless—rages between the mysterious cockney Solomon and the international crook Dominetti, with all Europe's governments at stake

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "The Mysterious John Solomon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SIGNOR DOMINETTI, unscrupulous foe of England and Fascist Italy, and guiding genius of a vast organization of international crooks, has clashed many times with the mysterious cockney John Solomon, whose power and organization are equally secret and incalculable.

But now Dominetti has struck. Solomon's headquarters in all Europe's capitals are bombed or sniped at, his secret agents are being "accidentally" killed in various ways. Solomon, man of Oriental mystery and cockney humor, marshals his forces to oppose Dominetti's hidden criminal plans.

This story began in the Argosy for February 15.

James Warden, recently of the American consulate at Le Havre, finds himself plunged into this unheralded, below-the-surface private war when a dear friend, June Tully, is spirited from a France-bound boat by Frank Halsey, a Dominetti agent, and his ally, Boris Glazunoff.

Dr. Lee, Chinese statesman, also was robbed by Halsey. Both Lee and Miss Tully were *en route* to see Solomon in Paris, Miss Tully bearing some communication from a Johns Hopkins professor who was revolutionizing physics.

Warden, with Solomon's agent North, traces Miss Tully to London; but Warden is lured to the Savoy Hotel by a forged message from Solomon.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE TRAP.

JAMES WARDEN walked into the Savoy with a feeling of no little satisfaction. He was about to come face to face with the pudgy little cockney who had suddenly assumed so mysterious an air of importance in the world—and he rather thought he would set his own doubts at rest in short order.

Besides, as he told himself, not for the first time, this man Solomon had something to answer for. Any one who dragged June Tully into a maze of murder would certainly answer for it, if Jimmy Warden knew anything about the matter.

His own apprehension regarding June was keen enough—had, in fact, increased to a very lively fear. This walk through the Strand had rather cleared his head, had tended to reduce him to a normal viewpoint. Warden was now prepared to face Solomon and, if necessary, throw all this fantastic intrigue overboard. He would probably be able to help June more by going direct to the embassy and getting Scotland Yard to work on the trail, than by parleying with agents of mystery and possible crime.

With this in mind, he strolled through the lounge, seeking some trace of the short, pudgy figure he remembered quite clearly. It was, really ridiculous to think of a man like that occupying any such position as North ascribed to him—an illiterate little old fellow with gray hair and wide blue eyes. More likely, he considered, Solomon was some sort of crank; heaven knew there were enough cranks loose in the world, capable of anything!

"Mr. Warden, sir?"

Turning, Warden saw at his elbow a darkly handsome man attired in the most correct morning costume. A foreigner, he thought at once.

"Yes," he rejoined.

The other bowed.

"I believe you expect to meet a gentleman here? I was asked to request you to go to Suite Eighteen—on the third floor."

With another bow, the speaker turned and sauntered out of the hotel, leaving Warden in no little astonishment. He might have been accosted as a casual acquaintance, instead of by a man whom he had never seen before.

A half scornful laugh broke on his lips. Evidently, Solomon liked to do things in a most roundabout and mysterious fashion! Well, such child's play must come to an end, and at once. With this resolve, Warden made his way to an elevator.

Naturally enough, the thought of possible danger never for an instant crossed his mind. Such a thought, in the midst of this huge American-model

hotel, was absurd. When he reached the third floor, Warden found number eighteen and knocked. A voice bade him enter, and he opened the door.

To his surprise, he found himself not in a hotel room, but in one of a suite of rooms, apparently offices. Here against a window a man sat at a desk, regarding him with polite inquiry. The American spoke first.

"My name is Warden."

"Ah, yes! Will you be seated, Mr. Warden? Excuse me a moment."

The man stepped to a door, tapped, opened it and disappeared. Next instant he returned.

"Will you go right in, Mr. Warden? Thank you."

MR. WARDEN went in. Instead of the figure he expected, he found himself facing an entirely different man who sat at a flat-topped desk littered with papers. This man was perhaps fifty years of age; Warden guessed him to be an Italian. Black hair just touched with gray, a high brow of extraordinary width, the whole face tapering down to a pointed, intolerant chin; but the most remarkable feature was the eyes.

These, instead of being dark, were of a light and vivid gray, affording a singular and striking contrast with the black hair and swarthy skin. They were filled with a most astonishing vigor; these eyes fairly burned into Warden, giving him full and sufficient warning of what energy lay in the brain behind them.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Warden. My name is Dominetti," and the speaker bowed slightly in his chair. "Will you have the kindness to be seated? I desire a little chat with you."

"Eh?" Warden was taken off guard. "But I thought—"

Dominetti smiled, and this smile lifted his thin lips in an oddly menacing fashion.

"You thought, perhaps, that Mr. Solomon was here? He is not, I assure you. Come, my dear sir, let us chat quietly and frankly. I assure you that Miss Tully is unharmed and is close by. If you like, you shall speak with her presently."

Warden blinked, sat down, tried to get himself in hand. Such a meeting as this was the last sort of thing he had expected; but the mention of June Tully's name served as a bracer.

So—instead of Solomon, the mysterious Dominetti! The man who, according to North, was the cleverest scoundrel in Europe. And North had warned him that Dominetti probably knew all about him by this time.

"A cigar?" Dominetti extended a silver box, and Warden found himself accepting a weed—of most exceptional quality, as the bouquet proved. "Come, let's be comfortable! I suppose you think Miss Tully was kidnaped and all that. Quite the contrary, I assure you. She was met by a friend of mine, was brought to this hotel, and has received every consideration."

"May I ask," said Warden, gathering himself together, "by what right—"

Dominetti lifted one tapering, slender hand.

"Right does not enter into the matter, Mr. Warden," he said impressively. "May I ask whether you have accepted any position with my very good friend, Mr. Solomon?"

"No," said Warden.

"Excellent. I should regret to be compelled to deal with you as one of his agents. Since you can act merely as a friend of Miss Tully's, that is very good indeed."

Dominetti lighted a cigar reflectively. The perfect poise of his manner, his absolute restraint, indicated all too clearly his actual power.

"See here!" exclaimed Warden, rallying. "You can't get away with this sort of thing in a place of this character, Dominetti. One word from me—"

"Give the word if you like," and Dominetti smiled at him.

WARDEN started to his feet, and turned to the door. It swung open to his hand; beyond it, in the outer office, he saw two men standing. Each of them held an automatic pistol, covering the doorway.

Warden halted, and, slamming the door swiftly, faced Dominetti. Behind and above the seated man was an open panel in the wall. Framed in this panel was a man's face, and the blued steel muzzle of a weapon looked down upon Warden.

"Melodrama!" snapped the American angrily. "You know you'd never risk a shot!"

"Try it," said Dominetti, puffing at his cigar with an air of quiet good humor. "But I advise you not to try it, my friend. Instead, sit down and chat, as I requested. I am well guarded, I assure you. Force will not serve you; diplomacy might."

Warden repressed his anger. "What's the idea of all this stage-setting?" he demanded.

"Precaution. I desire you to do me a service," returned the other, politely. "Will you be seated, and listen to me?"

Warden sat down.

"It is unfortunately the case," went on the Italian, "that I am blamed for many things of which I know nothing. What you have been told, I do not know; but I understand that if anything goes wrong in this part of the world, it is laid at my door. Let me assure you that all this is extravagant. For example, Miss Tully arrived here last night. She carries something which I wish to obtain. I asked her for it, and she refused. Good! She was not molested. I am now asking you to obtain it from her. She carries the document in question in her hand bag. As you can see, if I were the terrible creature some persons think me, nothing were easier than for me to rob her. Instead, I ask that she hand over this document, and she will then be at liberty to accompany you, whither you wish."

Warden listened to this amazing speech with an odd sensation of belief. The thing was incredible, yet he felt it was true. At the same time, he knew there was some excellent reason behind it all. He had been brought here, then, to make June Tully prove false to her trust?

"Bah! It's an absurdity—it's childish!" he exclaimed heatedly. "Dominetti, I'm no fool. Come, what's the answer? You don't pull the wool over my eyes for a moment. If you wanted to rob her, you'd do it."

The Italian laughed slightly, amusedly. "Yes? Quite right. But I don't want to, my good friend. To rob a lady would offend my sense of delicacy. Also, it would jeopardize me with the police. There I put my cards on the table. I suggest that you see—ah, excuse me."

The telephone buzzed. Dominetti listened for a moment, then spoke.

"Send him in at once."

He leaned back and waved his cigar at Warden.

"Think it over—I shall be free in a few moments. No, keep your seat. Good day, Mr. Matsura! Come in,

come in; we may talk freely before my friend here. Your report?"

A smiling, bespectacled Japanese gentleman entered, bowed, advanced to the desk, and spoke in fluent English.

"There is no doubt whatever about the matter. The man was killed by sound waves."

"Sound waves?" Dominetti frowned. "I do not understand. I was given to believe that this ray was a beam of intense light which could burn any given object out of existence. You know Pearson, the English scientist now in Paris, worked upon such a thing several years ago. Since he has been in charge of the present laboratory—"

MATSURA lifted a deprecatory hand.

"Pardon, sir, but you have been misinformed," he said politely. "When you laid the matter in our hands we, also, believed as you. Now we know better. It is not a beam of light which must be sought, but a beam of sound—it may, indeed, appear as light, yet it is sound."

"Explain," said Dominetti curtly.

"If light burns a thing, what happens? Ash results," responded the Japanese. "In the present case, there was no ash. There was nothing. The arm and hand remained, nothing else. The rest of the man had vanished."

Warden's attention was jerked sharply to these words. Could they be talking about that item in the Paris paper? Undoubtedly.

"Besides," went on the polite, evenly modulated voice, "you previously spoke to me about certain discoveries by Loomis of the Johns Hopkins University, which you hoped to place in our hands. Now, Loomis has been working upon sound waves. What is the result of these waves? The limit of human hearing is represented by waves oscillating at the rate of twenty thousand per second. Sound waves of, let us say, twenty times this speed, would destroy living tissue—they have destroyed it in laboratory experiments. They dissolve it into nothing, the very atoms disintegrating. You will observe, the process of burning does not destroy anything; it merely changes form. But these supersonic waves—ah, they destroy, disintegrate!"

"Very well," Dominetti cut in. "I am not a scientist and you are. What I desire is practical results. You know what has been done in Paris. Could you do the same thing?"

"Not without time and experiments," said Matsura.

The Italian frowned.

"There is no time," he said incisively. "Supposing I were to place in your hands the results attained by Loomis! The definite results of his latest experiments?"

The Japanese bowed. "Then we could achieve something, at least—perhaps a great deal."

"Very well. I'll send them to you within an hour."

Matsura clicked his heels and departed.

When the door had closed, Warden found those burning gray eyes fastened upon him with a compellent and disquieting intensity.

"How much of all this do you understand, Mr. Warden?" asked Dominetti.

"Mighty little," admitted Warden.

"Enough, however, to know that I am in earnest, I trust," and Dominetti's gaze narrowed a trifle. "My dear sir, I wish you to see Miss Tully. I wish you to advise her to hand over to me the papers which she carries. Do this,

and you and she are free to depart. If you refuse, if she refuses, I shall be very sorry for what will happen. Now, pray, forget anger!" And the tapering hand lifted as Warden was about to speak. "Believe me, my friend, anger is a very useless thing in this world. See her first, talk with her, and then make your decision. Persuade her or not, as you may decide. The matter rests with you."

"Very well," said Warden. "But if you think I can persuade her against her will, I assure you you are very much mistaken."

Dominetti broke into a clear, ringing laugh.

"I believe you!" he exclaimed, almost gayly. "Well, well, at all events neither you nor she can do me any harm, and I can afford to be generous. And remember, my friend: Do not be impulsive! I have had no obvious connection whatever with you or her, remember!"

The warning remained with Warden.

Dominetti clapped his hands, a man entered, and was ordered to escort the unwilling guest to Suite Twenty-four. So Jimmy Warden left the presence of this singular man, little dreaming where and how he was to see Dominetti again, or under what frightful circumstances that meeting with the Italian was to be.

So far as Warden was concerned, this meeting had one very definite result. He carried away a clear-cut impression of the suave Italian as a man of ruthless force; and he now knew past all doubt that what he had considered a fantastic dream was bitter hard reality. Melodrama, perhaps; but most certainly war—war without mercy, as North had said. And, once wakened to this realization, Jimmy Warden girded himself for the contest that he knew was before him.

HE followed his guide out into the corridor again, and around to the other side of the hotel. He perceived instantly what this meant. Dominetti had placed June Tully safely enough, probably under guard, but the Italian himself had not appeared in the transaction; if complaint were made, if the police were brought in, Dominetti could not be connected with the affair.

As the guide halted before Suite Twenty-four, Warden's glance swept around. The elevators were not close by, but there was a stairway just across the hall.

A man opened the door, admitted them in silence. Here was an ordinary hotel room, to all appearance. The man was swarthy, alert, inimical. He spoke with a marked accent.

"I have just received instructions," he said, and pointed to a door on the right of the room. "You will knock, please."

Warden went to the door, rapped sharply. Then something leaped in him as one word came in reply—one cool, defiant word in the voice of June Tully.

"Well?"

"It's—it's Jimmy Warden," he responded. For an instant he had found it hard to speak, as though something choked him. "June! Are you there?"

"Oh!"

The quick rising thrill of her exclamation, with all its amazed incredulity, shot through him. She had recognized his voice at once. Then there was the turn of a key, and the door before him was flung open.

She was standing there, staring out

at him—and suddenly her hands flew to meet his in swift greeting The strained lines of her face vanished in quick relief.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed. "It doesn't seem possible—it's a dream. "You've come for me?"

"To talk with you."

He turned, glanced at the two men. The foreigner bowed and gestured. With a nod, Warden stepped into the farther room and closed the door behind him. Here, he perceived, was a small two-room apartment.

"How on earth did you get here, Jimmy Warden?" demanded the girl, drawing back, staring at him as though he were a ghost.

Warden smiled, took her hand, patted it.

"No time for small talk now, June," he said. "Explanations later. Are you confined here?"

"Absolutely, Jimmy," she said, and gestured toward the other room. "Windows locked. No fire-escape. Nothing. You don't know the reason—"

"I know it all," he cut in, and her eyes widened in surprise. "Then there's only one way out of here? All right. Now, what about the papers you're carrying? Can you give them up or must you deliver them?"

Her gaze searched his face for one intent instant.

"You here, of all places—and you know all about it! What does it mean, Jimmy?"

He read the half suspicion in her eyes and voice, and smiled.

"It means that I'm here to get you to Solomon if possible. You suspect me, eh? Forget it." His manner became crisp, alert. "I'll tell you later how glad I am to see you, June; the most important thing now is safety. Dominetti sent me in to persuade you to give up what you carry. If you refuse, well and good; we'll smash a way out somehow. If your letters from Professor Loomis—"

"FORGIVE me, Jimmy." Her hand caught at his convulsively, and for a moment her eyes closed. "I—I had to doubt everything, every one! I thought I was meeting Mr. Solomon here; oh, you can't realize how clever, how infernally clever, they are! I was warned, too, and that only made it worse for me to walk right into a trap."

"Cheer up, old girl," said Warden cheerfully. "Never mind all that; look ahead, and not back! I walked into the trap myself, and now we have to get out of it. About the papers—"

June Tully picked up her hand bag from a chair and opened it.

"I don't understand their actions," she said, as her fingers moved deftly. "They could have used force, but did not. That man, Dominetti, was very polite—but I'm horribly afraid of him. Here's what they want—just this one letter."

She produced an unsealed envelope, which was addressed to Mr. John Solomon.

"Probably Dominetti feared you would destroy it," said Warden. "And he didn't want to get involved with the police—he hinted as much. Well?"

A sudden glint of laughter broke in her dark eyes as she spoke.

"Well, I happened to write this letter myself," she said. "You know, I was secretary to Professor Loomis. If you think we can get away, we'll turn over this letter to Dominetti."

"Eh?" Warden was amazed. "You're not in earnest?"

"Of course I am!" she exclaimed

eagerly. Her voice fell to a low murmur. "Haven't I been alone here since yesterday, Jimmy? I know this letter by heart. I can write out a copy of it, of every formula, of every word! And there's one essential word which makes or spoils the whole thing. Look!"

She swiftly opened the folded letter, and Warden saw a mass of neat typing —from which one word had been cut out of the paper, in two places. He comprehended on the instant.

"My word—good for you!" he exclaimed. His eyes swept the room. "What is there here you must take? Your grips?"

She made a gesture of dismissal.

"Nothing, nothing! If we can get away before he discovers that he's been tricked—"

"Good. Give it to me."

Warden took the letter, went to the door, and flung it open, the girl at his elbow. In the outer room, the two men, who had been sitting smoking, came to their feet. Warden stepped forward.

"Here is the document which Signor Dominetti wants," he said. "First, I must be sure that his word will be kept—that we shall be permitted to depart at once."

The foreigner bowed, and motioned toward the man who had brought Warden here.

"The letter will go instantly," he returned. "Signor Dominetti will telephone to me, and the door will be open. It will be only a very few moments, *signor.*"

Warden nodded. He had to make his decision instantly, and made it. On a table, beside the foreigner, he saw a pistol lying.

"Very well," and he handed the letter to the other man. "Go quickly, please."

He was alert for hidden traps, for unsuspected guards. However, the man left the room, and the open door showed an empty corridor outside. The foreigner flashed white teeth in a smile as he looked at June Tully and bowed.

"You will be seated, yes?" he asked politely. "The wait will be very short."

"Not worth while," said Warden, and produced his cigarette case. He must get the man away from that table if possible. "You have a match, I hope?"

"But yes, *signor.*"

The other produced a box of vestas, lighted one, held it out to Warden's cigarette.

WARDEN'S hand closed on his wrist, jerked him forward. He fell into a crashing left that knocked him sidewise, stilling the cry on his lips. Another blow, another—cruel blows, merciless, doubling him up in agony—and the man sagged limply to the floor, low inarticulate moans breaking from his lips. Warden darted to the table, seized the pistol there, turned.

"The door, June!"

She was already at the door, throwing it open. They were out in the corridor now; all empty here. Warden caught her arm, and next instant they had gained the stairs opposite and were descending narrow, carpeted stairs, leading down to the lounge and safety. Warden put away the pistol and drew a breath of relief.

"Fooled them! Beat them at their own game! If we—"

Two men suddenly uprose before them at the turn of the stairs—two swarthy figures, astonished, startled, yet closing the way against them. Warden had no time to reach his weapon. He hurled himself on the two, swept

them aside, went down with them in a tangled mass.

"On, June!" he cried. "Get a taxi—waiting—"

A fist hammered his lips into silence. Quick oaths, the thudding of rapid blows, the scraping thrust of writhing bodies on the carpeted stairs.

Out of the welter Warden scrambled, just evading the plunge of a knife that drove between arm and side.

Both of them were up now, both of them with knives; June Tully had vanished. Warden gave them no chance to dart in upon him, but caught the knife-wrist of the nearer man, kicked out at the other—a kick that reached the throat, with his weight behind it. That man went down and lay sprawled upon the stairs.

The other gave a cry, and with a twisting plunge wrenched the weapon clear. Warden countered with a smashing blow in the face, and brought up his knee to the stomach—no time for niceties! The Italian groaned and fell backward.

Warden went down the stairs two at a time, unhurt.

As he came to the ground level and strode rapidly toward the street entrance, his brain was hard at work. Now the safety of June Tully was paramount. Dominetti would know the secret was locked in her brain, and would not hesitate to have her killed rather than deliver that secret to John Solomon.

North's office in Chancery Lane? Not at all. Unsafe there, and this would be the first objective of the enemy also. Paris! At Croydon airdrome he could wire Solomon, could have the plane met at Le Bourget. He could wire North, too, for North must have discovered that the letter from Solomon was forged.

There was nothing in sight—no one in the lobby whom he knew. He was outside now, saw June waiting there, anxious, white-faced, beside a taxi. At sight of him, relief sprang into her face, and she entered the cab.

"Croydon airdrome," said Warden to the driver. "And an extra sovereign if you make it in half an hour."

"I'll do me bloomin' best, guv'nor!"

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUSE OF SOLOMON.

THE Rue Montorgeuil, that very heart of ancient Paris now doomed to extinction under the inexorable law of progress, whereby a city beautiful will ultimately replace a city medieval, was a narrow and gloomily dark old street. Here were crowded, leaning walls, a maze of ruinous buildings, a few old-fashioned residences—most of them long since converted to other uses.

One of these former mansions, two stories about a central courtyard, had in recent years been somewhat restored to its ancient glories, yet remained a place of mystery to all the neighborhood; market gossip said it was occupied by a Russian prince. Great cars came and went at all hours; glimpses were had of servants in strange costumes; not infrequently callers arrived, escorted by agents of the *Sûreté*—heads of state, perhaps, or distinguished foreign visitors.

According to rumor—and a Parisian rumor is apt to be well founded—the old mansion had been occupied after Waterloo by a great nobleman who, taking no more chances on revolutions and guillotines, had connected his residence with the outer world by subterranean passages.

However this might be, all the quarter was looking forward with lively curiosity to the approaching demolition. Within another six months the old landmark would be wiped out, and many strange things were expected to be brought to light.

Upon a warm spring evening—it was the same day that had witnessed Jimmy Warden's hurried flight to London and return—a crawling red Renault taxi crept up the street and came to a halt before the massive bronze gates of the old house. These gates stood open, and the courtyard was dimly illumined by a single electric light. The chauffeur turned to speak with his fare, then uttered a disgusted oath and climbed out.

He stamped into the entrance and rang the bell of the *concierge*. An old woman came forth and greeted him.

"Sacred name of a species of pig!" exclaimed the chauffeur. "Your pardon, *madame,* I was addressing this cabbage of a foreigner who is in my cab. We seek the residence of one M'sieur Solomon. Can this be it?"

"It most assuredly can," said the *concierge*.

"Then," said the chauffeur, "let some one come and give me a hand with this imbecile, for he is drunk and has fallen and hurt himself, since there is blood on his face. I picked him up outside the Porte de la Vilette—"

"Drive in, then, drive in," said the old dame tartly. "I will have some one help you."

The chauffeur climbed back into his cab and swung the vehicle through the entrance into the courtyard. There, a sudden brilliant light flooded the cobblestones, and two men came out of the house to the cab. Both were Arabs, garbed in loose white robes. They helped the chauffeur get his fare out of the cab, and examined the unconscious man.

"Bruised—and a scratch across the cheek. His nose has bled. Nothing worse," said one of the Arabs, and turned to the chauffeur. "Where did you get him?"

The chauffeur recounted his story—how he was returning from Le Bourget when this man had appeared, apparently drunk, beside the road and halted him. The name and address of Solomon were given. That was all.

"Very well." The Arab pressed a bill into the hand of the chauffeur. "Go and forget it. We'll take care of him."

The taxi departed. The two Arabs lifted Jimmy Warden and carried him into the house.

WARDEN opened his eyes to a vision of luxurious surroundings—soft lights, thick rugs, walls adorned with bizarre ornaments and weapons. A man was bathing his face. Another was holding a drink to his lips.

Warden swallowed deeply, and looked around.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed. "Solomon—"

"Solomon Effendi awaits you, Mr. Warden," said one of the dark-faced men. "You are safe; if you are able to walk, come with me."

Warden rose, repressed a groan, and staggered after the Arab.

A moment later he found himself in a rather small and very plain room. It contained a few chairs, a large desk, and upon the floor a magnificent old Shiraz rug. At the desk sat a pudgy little old man whose round face was quite devoid of expression; the mild blue eyes looked at him with a placid and childlike gaze. Then things swirled

around, and Warden felt himself lowered into the depths of a large armchair.

"Take it easy, Mr. Warden," said a wheezy voice. "There ain't nothin' like takin' of it easy, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid. You're all right, and werry 'appy I am to see you a settin' 'ere. I'll make so bold as to go on with me work, if you don't mind."

"But I must tell you," cried Warden desperately, trying to struggle up.

"Don't do it, sir," came Solomon's voice. "I know all about it already. Take it easy."

Warden relaxed, giving way to a resigned helplessness. Gradually his senses cleared, and things took shape before him. Solomon was speaking with one man and another who came in and went out, but in a strange tongue—Arabic, thought Warden.

Light came through a large crystal pane set in the ceiling. It was a queer and ghastly illumination, yet pleasant enough. Under its radiance, all reds became purples, and Warden, looking down at his hands, saw that his skin was an unearthly yellow. A violet ray light of some sort, he concluded. Odd that it should be used for lighting; yet, why not?

His attention centered upon the little man at the desk, and wonder possessed him. The appearance of Solomon was anything but impressive. Yet that pudgy face, those blue eyes so curiously lacking in any expression, were singular in the extreme. From beneath a Basque *beret* gray wisps of hair escaped at odd angles. The man's clothes were rumpled, as though slept in recently, and he was sucking at an old clay pipe, which smelled most vilely. All in all, a helpless old man in appearance, yet possessed of a certain poise, a certain nameless restraint and quiet assurance, which grew upon the observer.

A buzzer sounded. Solomon dismissed a man speaking with him, and took up the telephone receiver from the desk.

"Oh! It's you, Mr. North!" he said. "Werry 'appy I am to 'ear from you, sir. Mr. Warden, 'e just got 'ere—yes, all by 'imself, just like that. I 'opes as 'ow you ain't got no more bad news, sir?

"What's that again? Well, sir, if I was you I'd leave the London office to run itself, and get back 'ere. Things is mortal bad, Mr. North; I don't rightly know what's a going to 'appen, for a fact. You won't 'ave Yusuf to-morrow, neither. He went out to meet Mr. Warden and Miss Tully, and they up an' got 'im, just like that. Yes, sir. In the St. Ouen clinic now, 'e is, 'is shoulder dislocated and 'is leg broke. They took the car and went on with it to Le Bourget. Comin' back, they threw Mr. Warden out and went off with Miss Tully. No, 'e ain't 'urt to speak of. You ain't 'ad no word from Berlin?"

A SUDDEN trace of excitement showed in Solomon's eyes, and he caught up a pencil. "What's that again, Mr. North? Dang it, sir, you're sure o' that 'ere date? Werry good. You get back 'ere on the night plane, sir. Good-by."

Solomon pressed down the hook, keeping the receiver to his ear, and spoke rapidly.

"Get 'old o' Mr. Newton at Rome, and get 'im quick."

Putting down the instrument, Solomon picked up a plug of very black tobacco and began to whittle at it with a case knife. Suddenly Warden start-

ed, and his hand went to his pocket. He drew forth a crumpled sheet of paper, on which were penciled words.

"Here! She said—give you that. It's complete."

He leaned forward and put the paper on the desk. Solomon picked it up, glanced at it, and whistled. Then he pressed a button; an Arab appeared at the doorway.

Solomon gave him the paper, and spoke in French.

"Take this. Take Ahmed ben Zain with you. Use my own car, and deliver this to M'sieur Pearson at the laboratory. Telephone him you are coming, so he'll expect you. If you fail, do not return here, for shame will be upon your head."

The Arab saluted with dignity and departed.

The buzzer rang, and Solomon took up the receiver.

"That you, Mr. Newton? Werry good. You pay sharp attention, sir, this 'ere is most important. Grand Duke Basil, now at Berlin, will be in Paris on the twenty-fifth. You get up to the Chigi Palace right away, sir, see the Duce 'imself, and tell 'im that 'ere fact. Tell 'im Baron Yamanaka is a goin' to be in Paris at the same time; comin' from London, 'e is. That lets the cat out of the bag, sir—now we 'ave something to work on. All right, sir, you do that. Good-by."

Laying down the instrument, Solomon sighed wheezily, tamped the whittled tobacco into his clay pipe, and struck a match.

"Now I can 'ave a bit o' rest," he observed between puffs. "A bite to eat might do us both a mortal lot o' good, Mr. Warden. Don't you go to talkin' now. A man as asks questions gets less 'n he asks, I says. Food and sleep, that's what you need, sir."

Solomon pressed a button, an Arab appeared, and departed with an order. Meantime, Jimmy Warden stared at the singular little man. Was it true that Solomon had just sent an emissary to Mussolini in person? Fantastic!

The thought of June Tully tugged at him, wrenched at him. She was gone, then; Solomon knew about it, and sat here doing nothing! They had taken her with the car, Warden had been dragged out and flung in the ditch, all in a moment's time, without a fight, without a chance to do anything! Then, to his astonishment, Solomon spoke as though reading his very thoughts.

"She's all right, Mr. Warden—they won't 'urt 'er none. I've been discoverin' a lot o' things, as the old gent said when 'e fired the 'ousekeeper. To-morrow you and Mr. North can take things in 'and, so to speak. Now we'll 'ave a bit o' grub and talk about somethin' else."

An Arab entered with a tray and set dishes on the desk. Solomon addressed him.

"Tell Hassan to bring in the coffee when it's ready. You take the Hispano car and go to the Hôtel de Choiseul, and fetch Prince Sergei Romanoff here at once. If he's not there, find him, and bring him. He'll come."

WARDEN noted with some surprise that when speaking any other language Solomon seemed to have no trouble with his aspirates, yet with English the cockney twang was unmistakable. Now, at a gesture, Warden drew a straight chair up to the desk, joined Solomon at a most appetizing repast, and speedily felt in a better frame of mind.

"I expect as you know Prince Sergei?" asked Solomon.

Warden nodded. "I know who he is, of course. Grand Duke Basil is the direct heir to the Russian throne—or is so accepted by most of the exiled Russians. Sergei has a pretty good claim himself, and has a minority following. No love lost between them, I understand. Basil seems to be a Romanoff of the old type, conservative, high-hat, autocratic—and some bad stories are told about him. Sergei isn't so bad."

"That 'ere Grand Duke is a mortal bad egg, sir—just like that," observed Solomon between bites. "True, 'e's got a lot o' money and a lot o' backin', but 'e ain't me choice by a good deal, not 'im! Mr. Warden, who's the most powerful man in Europe to-day?"

Warden shrugged. "No two ways about that, Solomon. The Duce."

"Make it John, sir, make it John," said the little cockney. "I'm John to me friends, sir, and werry 'appy I am to 'ave you in the number. We'll 'ave some real Arabian coffee— Ah, there's Hassan now!"

Another Arab entered, placed coffee before them, set out cigarettes, cigars.

When he was gone, Solomon leaned back in his chair and sighed wheezily. "I ain't as young as I was, Mr. Warden, or I wouldn't be a settin' 'ere dependin' on other men to be 'elpin' of me! No, sir. But age is a werry mysterious thing, as the old gent said when 'e up an' kissed the 'ousemaid. Now, sir, about that 'ere Mussolini—the Duce. If 'e was to up an' back the Grand Duke, we'd 'ave another Russian czar—but 'e won't do it. And why? 'Cause 'e knows that 'ere Grand Duke is a treacherous dog, just like that. The Duce 'as 'is enemies, Mr. Warden, but 'e 'as 'is friends likewise. If I do say it as shouldn't, 'im and me are werry good friends, sir."

Having delivered himself of these amazing words, Solomon sipped his coffee and pursued the topic, his mild blue eyes dwelling tranquilly upon Warden.

"I don't 'old with no Bolsheviks and such, sir, and neither does Rome. This ere new Italy is a great country, and it's all for doin' of things right and as they should be. It don't straddle the fence to wait and see who's goin' to win, like England and France, and it don't 'ave no truck wi' bloody murderers for the sake of policy. What would 'appen, sir, if so be as Rome was to back this 'ere Sergei Romanoff?"

"Well," and Warden smiled faintly, "Mussolini would have the wrong cat by the tail. And he wouldn't have much influence in Russian affairs."

"Oh, werry good, sir!" A wheezy chuckle broke from Solomon. Somewhere a bell sounded very softly. "I expect this is 'im now, and if you'll be so good as to listen, sir—"

"One minute," interrupted Warden. "About Miss Tully?"

"In the mornin', sir," and Solomon held up his hand in restraint. "She ain't come to no 'urt, upon me word. Oh, come in, prince! I'm werry 'appy to see you lookin' so well. This 'ere is me friend, Mr. Warden. Hassan, coffee for Prince Sergei. Make yourself at 'ome, your 'ighness, and we'll 'ave a bit of a talk between friends, so to speak. There ain't nothin' like friendship to break the ice, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the new 'ousemaid."

Prince Sergei laughed amusedly as he bowed to Warden and took a seat. He was a man of forty, his features deeply lined, grave, yet capable of great animation. If his face held no great strength, it did hold a kindly dignity and a promise of high possibilities.

"I suppose you have some news, eh?" he observed in English. Hassan was setting coffee before him, and holding a match to his cigarette.

"More or less, your 'ighness," said Solomon.

WARDEN observed that Solomon's manner seemed habitually deferential, almost apologetic; it afforded a strange and striking contrast with the words that sometimes came from his lips. And always his wide blue eyes were innocent, devoid of expression; save for an occasional twinkle, they seldom changed.

"Excellent," said the prince, half idly, half in alert expectancy. "Your man brought me here on short notice, Solomon. I left a lady waiting."

Solomon took up his plug and began to whittle tobacco. For some reason, Warden tensed. The moment was electric, charged with tremendous things. He marveled at his own feeling.

"Yes, sir," said Solomon. "That's werry true o' princes, your 'ighness. There's always a lady waitin'—to spoil the course of 'istory, just like that."

The prince stiffened, his eyes struck out sharply. Warden, despite weariness, despite stiffness and bruises, was suddenly jarred into acute suspense.

"What d'you mean?" demanded Prince Sergei.

"I means," returned Solomon, whittling very carefully, "as 'ow your own fate and the 'ole bloomin' destiny of Russia is a goin' to be settled in this 'ere room, inside of 'alf an hour. Ten minutes ago I got the clew to the 'ole blessed thing in me own 'ands—and I'm ready to talk business, your 'ighness."

"*Mon Dieu!*" ejaculated the Russian. "Are you serious?"

Solomon chuckled. "There ain't nothin' serious in this 'ere world, I says, except maybe bein' born into it. 'Ere you be, sir, all shipshape and Bristol fashion—" and taking a box of wax vestas from the desk, he began setting out slips of wax, the while he went on speaking.

"First off, 'ere *you* be, your 'ighness. Over 'ere is Grand Duke Basil—and who's with 'im? Some o' the old nobility. A predominant party in Germany, ready to back 'im. Chief of all, Signor Dominetti."

"Dominetti? That Italian prince-exile?" The Russian's voice was acid with contempt. "Of what use is he? How can he help Basil?"

"First off, wi' money," said Solomon. "Second, with influence. This 'ere blackguard 'as a 'old on a lot o' people, your 'ighness—blackmail. Your brother Nicholas is a payin' 'im or 'is agents a thousand francs every month."

"Nicholas—that boy? Impossible!" exclaimed the prince, but the color drained from his face as he spoke. "Well, well. What actual help can he give Basil?"

"Political 'elp, financial 'elp—and a weapon," said Solomon earnestly. "A machine, a death ray, that can sweep men and things out of existence."

"You mean, like that English invention—the one that never worked?"

"Just like that, sir," said Solomon. "Only better. This 'ere works. Now, then, besides Dominetti—who else? Japan. When Grand Duke Basil attacks with German 'elp from the west, Japan throws 'er armies into Siberia, attacks from the east. When Basil is made Czar, Japan takes part o' Siberia, to keep. It's a werry good bargain for Japan, your 'ighness. If you— Dang it! Excuse me a minute, sir."

At the buzz, Solomon picked up the telephone and spoke. For a moment he listened. Then:

"Now, 'old on a minute! This is you, Patterson—in Constantinople? And Sotheby was killed in Angora. All right. If you 'ave the information, let me 'ave it, mortal quick, sir. Yes—Kemal Pasha 'as signed the agreement? And 'e supports Basil by attacking Russia from the south, seizing the Crimea? Yes. And what's 'is ruddy terms—oh! So 'e's a sendin' Fakri Pasha to Paris to meet Basil 'ere, eh? Werry good, sir."

Solomon hung up. Prince Sergei was intent, wide-eyed, staring.

"ANGORA attacks Russia from the south—at a price!" murmured the prince. "What does Basil promise?"

"I don't know yet, sir," returned Solomon. "But there you be. And the brains behind the 'ole blessed thing is Dominetti. Let Basil win Russia, and everybody gets a slice. Once on the throne, 'e supports Dominetti and the royalist party against Mussolini, and disrupts Italy to get them back in power there."

Prince Sergei nodded. Warden, however, suddenly perceived a ray of light. He had already begun to suspect that this amazing little man was a very active Fascist partisan—and now the suspicion became conviction.

"So you're acting for the Duce, John?" he blurted out. Solomon chuckled wheezily.

"Yes, sir, I am—just like that," he returned. "And now, your 'ighness, I'm ready to talk business; if so be as you'll 'ear me out."

Prince Sergei took a fresh cigarette, leaned back in his chair, nodded.

"Speak," he said quietly. "If I am put on the throne of Holy Russia—what part of her throat do you want to cut, you and the blacksmith's son who rules Italy?"

The bitter words drew no expression from Solomon, who was lighting his pipe.

"You ain't on the throne yet, sir," he returned. "Basil would barter away 'alf o' Russia in order to 'ave the other 'alf. You won't. Just 'ere behind you," and his hand went out to the wax vestas on the table, "is, first, the Nationalist government in China."

"Disrupted into factions, weak, helpless!" sneered the Russian.

"The Duce, and Italy," went on Solomon, unheeding. "Munitions, men, power, floodin' into Rumania, where the veterans o' Wrangel's army are a waitin' for you, sir. No barterin', no waste o' time, no danged negotiations—a quick, sharp stroke wi' fifty thousand men straight up at Moscow and Leningrad! While Basil talks, you take Russia! Fifty thousand men in two weeks' time, your 'ighness; a fleet of airplanes, a flood o' tanks, mobile artillery—and this 'ere machine that sweeps men and things away into nothin'!"

Now, staring at Solomon, the Russian's keen features were lighted by a flush, his deep eyes kindled into fire; the words, the vision, swept him into momentary exaltation. Then a cold bitterness came back into his gaze.

"All this needs money," he said slowly. "Italy may provide much, but she cannot provide money."

"I can, your 'ighness," said Solomon quietly. "I can turn over to you fifty million dollars to-morrow—and obtain a credit of a billion."

There was m o m e n t a r y silence. Prince Sergei caught his breath, staring hard. Warden, too, looked at this

pudgy, unassuming, blank-eyed little man who puffed a clay pipe and spoke the incredible. Yet Sergei seemed to find it not so incredible.

"And you? And Italy?" asked the Russian in a low, tense voice. "Your pound of flesh?"

"Mine? Repayment of that 'ere money, without interest. Italy's? The destruction of communism in Russia. That's all, your 'ighness. But you 'ave to decide 'ere and now, to-night! On the twenty-fifth Basil comes 'ere from Berlin. 'E meets Baron Yamanaka, the Japanese ambassador to London, and the 'eads of the Russian Imperial Council."

"Basil—here! In Paris!" exclaimed Sergei. Then a sudden passion flamed in his face and voice. "And you—and Rome—you ask nothing more? No Russian territory? Bah! Are you, then, philanthropic fools?"

"Perhaps, sir." Solomon reached out to the telephone. "You know the voice of the Duce?"

"I have met him, yes," assented the prince, suddenly very pale.

Solomon picked up the receiver. "Get me the Chigi Palace—I want to speak wi' the Duce 'imself. Right off."

ABSURD! Warden stirred in his chair, not believing what he heard or saw. That this pudgy little man should seek Mussolini over the air, should demand instant speech!

"It is madness! It is a dream!" said Prince Sergei, his eyes wide. Solomon made no response. Abruptly Warden recalled the former conversation with Newton, evidently the agent in Rome. Could it be possible, after all? Was the Duce, there in Rome, awaiting just such a call as this? Was the Fascist party, that bitter enemy of Bolshevism, ready to back this man?

"Yes, sir," Solomon broke into quick speech. "This 'ere is John Solomon, sir. Prince Sergei Romanoff is werry anxious to 'ave a bit o' speech with you, sir, if so be as you 'as the time— 'Ere you be, your 'ighness."

He held out the instrument. Sergei, like a man in a dream, took it, hesitated, spoke in Italian. Warden knew the language well enough to follow his words, but was too lost in amazement to care about them. Either this was a colossal bluff or else—or else it was history in the making; history, cooked up like broth by this pudgy little man with the wide blue eyes!

Then, presently, Solomon had the instrument and was listening, while Prince Sergei sat back and regarded him fixedly, nervous, utterly astonished, yet visibly convinced. And when Solomon finished his talk and leaned back again with his stained clay pipe, the Russian drew a long breath and stooped forward, placing his two hands on the desk.

"Very well, my friend," he said in a solemn voice. "You have—you have convinced me. It is true. And my answer is—*yes!* I accept!"

"Werry good, sir." Solomon opened a drawer of his desk and brought forth a *dossier* of papers. "The agreement is 'ere, all shipshape. But there ain't a word to be said about it, mind that—not until you're in the field, leading that 'ere army to Moscow!"

Sergei nodded, leaned farther forward, began examining the papers.

Jimmy Warden knew in his heart that it was no dream, that it was no fantastic conception, but an excellent plan mapped out in cold reality. Sergei was the idol of the old Russian army, a stern but just man, a born soldier. With an army of fifty thousand men,

with no lack of equipment, with a terrible and unguessed weapon, he could cut Russia in two before the Reds could awaken to their peril; he could seize Moscow and Leningrad, he could gather around him all the shattered, dormant elements of old Russia.

So, sitting there in the bare little room, which still held undreamed secrets for him, Warden saw the papers signed, saw the two men shake hands, found himself bowing to the stately Russian—and then was alone again with Solomon.

"So that's that, Mr. Warden." Of a sudden, he looked aged and tired, drawn, a great weariness in his eyes. "That 'ere is the one man who can turn the trick. And now, sir, if I was you I'd get to bed. We'll 'ave a talk in the mornin', you and me and Mr. North. And I could do with a bit o' sleep meself. I ain't as young as I was, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid."

So Warden found himself led away by an Arab; led to a steaming bath, a careful massage by expert hands, a downy bed into which he sank. For the moment, remembrance of June Tully was gone from him amid the rush of greater, more incredible things. For the moment only.

Yet, as he fell asleep, all his wonder died away and was gone in cold sanity. After all, when it came down to facts, just how much reliance could be placed in this man of mystery, John Solomon? As pitted against Dominetti, for example? Warden realized clearly enough that this whole great game was being played between these two protagonists—and where lay the strength of Solomon?

As a matter of fact, he had none. Money he might have, yes; but Dominetti had money, too. Solomon's men, his agents, his organization—all were obviously being smashed to bits right and left. He had none of Dominetti's virile strength and unscrupulous energy.

"But he has a brain!" thought Warden. "Yes, a brain—and what good will it do him? Dominetti has gone beyond him, has circled Russia with potential enemies, has secured backing in every way—and what has Solomon done? Nothing, except talk with a man sitting in the Chigi Palace."

And, upon despondency, with the thought of June Tully tearing at him in cruel despair, Jimmy Warden fell asleep in the house of John Solomon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT OPENS.

"TELL me about Solomon—who he is," said Warden. "I suppose you can talk now."

North laughed. The two men were at breakfast together in a huge oak-paneled dining room, whose painted ceiling showed nymphs and graces disporting themselves in the most florid Empire style. Solomon had not yet joined them. North had come in during the night, and looked exceedingly fresh and fit. Warden, except for a few bruises and a scratched cheek, was quite himself.

"There'll be more than talk doing to-day," returned North. "What happened last night?"

Warden grinned. "Ask Solomon. Enough to make me damned curious."

"Huh! You're not talking, eh? All right, Sherlock." North chuckled as though enjoying himself. "Our friend is just plain John Solomon; there's no other like him. He's an old man with one foot in the grave. You know what

Aeschylus called old men? Dreams left wandering in the day. That's him."

"You're a liar," said Warden cheerfully. "Come across."

"Not much to come across with," returned North. "Seriously, I understand John has spent most of his life in Arabic-speaking countries. He's immensely rich, so far as actual money goes, and he's still richer in his friends and connections. You've heard of Sir Basil Condax, the Greek, who married a Spanish princess before the war, and who was said to make and unmake thrones and republics—lending money, selling munitions, throwing a huge mass of wealth into the stock market at critical times to further his own string-pulling? I understand that Solomon wiped him out a few years ago and since then has been enjoying himself—in the interests of peace rather than of war. I've seen some queer things happen in this house. But here's the gentleman himself. Morning, John!"

"Morning, gents," said Solomon, from the doorway. He came into the room, walking a bit stiffly, and took the chair held back for him by the deft white-clad Hassan. "Werry 'appy I am to see you lookin' so fine, both of you. If I ain't mistook, we'll 'ave a 'ard day ahead, as the old gent said when 'e caught the butler a kissin' of the 'ousemaid."

"Just who was that old gent of yours, John?" demanded North. Solomon wrinkled his face into a smile.

"That 'ere is a secret, sir. Wouldn't do to make it public. Well, Mr. Warden, I expect as 'ow you're a thinkin' about Miss Tully? As soon as I get a bit o' food, sir, we'll 'ave in a few reports and such; and unless I change me mind, I'll leave 'er in your 'ands, with Mr. North a helpin' of you."

"Oh, you will!" said North dryly. "And what about other things, John?"

Solomon's blank blue eyes twinkled at him.

"You'll likely find out, Mr. North, as 'ow there ain't nothin' more important than this werry matter o' Miss Tully, just like that."

So saying, John Solomon went on with his breakfast, unhurried. The other two men sat in silence before this placid unconcern; North was frowning slightly, as though puzzled and uncertain. Jimmy Warden, to his own surprise, found his doubts of the previous night swept away in the presence of the little cockney. Then, abruptly, North turned to him.

"YOU might as well understand one thing, Warden," he said grimly. "This man Solomon uses men like pawns on a chessboard. He drives ahead to his aim, he sacrifices you or me without a thought or a care—his whole concern is in the final checkmate. Isn't that so, John?"

"No, sir, it ain't," said Solomon, and he glanced at North with a startled hurt in his gaze. "Leastwise, you don't look at it rightly. It ain't that at all. You take Dominetti now. What's 'e doin'? Piling up a score, that's what! Providence is a werry mysterious thing, Mr. North, and men like 'im don't take it into account, which is a mortal bad error to make. If so be as you makes a mistake and one o' Dominetti's men puts a bullet into you, that ain't me own fault, is it? A man pays for 'is mistakes, says I—"

"And you don't make any," cut in North, half angrily.

"No, sir, I don't," said Solomon with simple earnestness. "If so be as Yusuf 'ad kept 'is wits about 'im last night, 'e wouldn't be in 'ospital now.

If so be as Mr. Warden 'ad watched 'imself, 'e wouldn't ha' been caught nappin'. Ain't that true, Mr. Warden?"

"Yes," said Warden, reluctantly.

"Then," and Solomon rose, "let's be a gettin' to work."

The three men passed to the blank little office of Solomon, whose desk was heaped with papers. Opening a drawer, Solomon took forth a long-cuffed gauntlet and then pressed a button. He handed the gauntlet to Warden, as the room was filled with that unearthly violet-ray light.

"If so be as you'll put this on, Mr. Warden, we'll make a mark on your wrist, so me men will know you as one of us. Or—wait! Dominetti knows that 'ere mark. No, we'll let it go. There's no use temptin' the enemy."

Warden returned the glove, and remembered the Seal of Solomon that had appeared to be burned into the wrists of North and Fisher. Solomon carefully whittled tobacco, filled and lighted his pipe, and began to go through the papers on his desk.

"This 'ere light," he observed, sorting the papers into neat piles, "is a werry good thing for an old man like me. Keeps 'im young, it does. Well, Ahmed ben Zain?"

A tall Arab appeared in the doorway, touched his hand to brow, lips and breast in reply to Solomon's greeting, and spoke briefly in Arabic. Solomon leaned back in his chair.

"Werry good, Ahmed. Bring 'im in."

Warden saw North stir expectantly, and felt a swift tenseness in the air. In the doorway appeared a bound man between two Arabs. The prisoner was a small rat-eyed man, his face vicious in the extreme, and he burst forth in speech which showed that he was an American.

"What do you mean by this, huh?" he exclaimed. "Just because I made a mistake and got into the wrong house—that ain't nothing. You can't hold me on no charge, understand?"

Solomon did not reply, but looked blankly at him, and he fell silent. Ahmed stepped forward and laid a number of articles on the desk, evidently coming from the pockets of the prisoner; a jimmy, a large roll of American bank notes, a revolver fitted with a silencer, and a glass flagon, sealed with wax and filled with a colorless liquid. Solomon took up this flagon with a show of interest and picked at the wax with his nail.

"Fer God's sake lay off that!" cried out the prisoner. That—that—"

"Yes?" Solomon laid down the flagon. "I suppose this 'ere would bust and there'd be an explosion and fire, most like. So Dominetti give this 'ere to you, did 'e?"

"Never heard of him," said the prisoner sullenly.

Solomon made a gesture. The prisoner was shoved into a chair and sat there like a trapped animal, alert, waiting. Ahmed stepped to the one window of the room, set high in the wall, and drew a blind across it. Solomon touched another of the buttons on his desk, and the glare of light faded slightly in the room.

North, who seemed to know what was going on, looked at the blank wall behind the desk, and Warden followed his gaze. So did the prisoner—and then a choked cry of incredulity burst forth, and was silenced.

THERE on the wall appeared a picture, silent, moving, life-size.

It swiftly grew and took form. A man—the prisoner—was standing before a desk, at which sat another

man. Warden repressed a start; this second man was no other than Dominetti in person. Dominetti looked up, his lips moved, and the prisoner assented. Dominetti handed him a flagon, apparently the same which lay upon Solomon's desk, and spoke warningly about it. The prisoner nodded with scornful unconcern and pocketed it. Dominetti handed him a silenced revolver, and a roll of money. The picture faded abruptly.

"It's a damned lie!" cried out the prisoner, his features ghastly.

"Take 'im away," said Solomon, with a jerk of his head. The man was dragged out of the room, leaving behind a trail of obscenity and curses.

Warden looked around. In the walls were set two crystal panes, like that overhead from which came the radiance; but there was no sign of any motion picture camera. He met the gaze of North, and the latter smiled.

"Startling, eh? Yet it's logical enough, Warden. You'd have to get Pearson to explain it in scientific terms—he's in charge of our laboratory in Auteuil, and this is one of his pet toys that John has turned to use. Take a man, place him in that chair, make the contact, and get his brain working on a certain subject—and the pictures in his brain are flung on the wall."

"Simple," said Warden ironically. "But how?"

North shrugged. "How is television worked? What is electricity? What is life? Ask me something easy. Pearson was working on a method of recording thoughts on a film, and found that up to a certain point, with a certain type of person, thoughts are pictures, images. His devilish machine—it's in the next room—makes some application of the infra-red rays, and other light-effects Pearson has discovered; it digs the pictures out of a man's brain and throws them on the wall here. It works about twice in five times—often there's only a blur. Pearson himself is afraid of the damned thing, doesn't know what effect the rays have on the human subject, and wouldn't perfect it or carry his experiments farther. John took over the contraption, and isn't worried about what might happen to the chap in the chair."

"I'd be werry sorry to use it on either o' you two gents," said Solomon, sorting out his papers again. Warden stirred uneasily.

"Do you mean that this man was sent here by Dominetti?"

"Just like that, sir," and Solomon nodded. "You've talked wi' Dominetti 'imself?"

Warden assented, and found North eying him with new interest.

"What do you think of 'im, sir?" demanded Solomon placidly.

"About as dangerous as they make 'em," said Jimmy Warden. "Those light gray eyes of his—well, they're bad. There's power in them, but not a good sort of power."

"Right you are, sir," assented Solomon, and relit his pipe. "Now we can get down to business, gents. First off, about Miss Tully."

"You know where she is?" broke out Warden eagerly.

"Yes, sir, and she ain't comin' to no 'arm. Now, 'ere's a report on Halsey, who engineered her abduction."

He handed Warden a typed sheet, and North leaned over to scan it with him. However obtained, the information was concise and to the point:

HALSEY, FRANK. Alias: J. H. Frank, Gentleman Hall

Age 42. Education, Harvard. Family, good. Adept at stock market rigging, high-class confidence work. Promoted

General Finance Corporation, Western Oil, etc. Prosecuted and convicted in 1923, served three years; sentence commuted good behavior. Indicted twice, but failed conviction. Ability, very high. For past two years has conducted Chicago office as agent of Dominetti, handling large stock transactions through Middle West. Twice named as corespondent divorce actions. Has twice been in Europe, recently.

"AND just where does he come in on this deal?" asked Warden.

"Right now," said Solomon, "you'll find 'im at Dominetti's villa in Boulogne-sur-Seine. 'Im and that 'ere Russian, Glazunoff. Miss Tully's there, too. This 'ere Halsey is interested in 'er, so to speak. I'm werry much afraid, gents, as 'ow Dominetti is a fixin' to 'it me 'arder yet—and if I was you, Mr. Warden, I'd do me best to get on the inside o' that 'ere villa. You 'ave a werry good chance o' makin' it, sir."

"How?" Warden frowned. "Break in? Or as a spy?"

"You and Mr. North can fix that up, if so be as you're disposed," said Solomon.

Warden laughed harshly. "Oh, I'm disposed all right!" he said. "Why not let me appear as an interested party—say, as the agent of Prince Sergei?"

Solomon regarded him with a fixed expression, the blue eyes very wide.

"Dang it, sir—now we're a gettin' somewhere! I'll 'ave a letter 'ere in 'alf an hour, authorizin' you to treat on 'is behalf, just like that! And you can sell 'im out or do as you danged well please, yes, sir! If so be as you're a good liar, all werry fine—and 'avin' been a diplomat, I'd be werry sorry indeed if you couldn't tell a lie, Mr. Warden."

There followed a half hour of detailed discussion, Solomon meantime telephoning Prince Sergei for a letter appointing James Warden as his agent.

What was more to the point, Warden learned also that he and North would be flung entirely on their own resources.

"It's you gents as is fightin', so do it in your own way, says I," he observed. "I'll take on Dominetti me own self when the time comes. Dang it! I'm werry much afraid as 'ow that 'ere man is a fixin' to strike at Pearson and 'is laboratory in Rue Jasmin."

This was the second time Solomon had voiced the same fear, and Warden looked at the pathetically absurd little figure with a sudden blank dismay. This man—against Dominetti! It was ridiculous. Solomon, for all his brain, was old, cautious, slow; his organization was paralyzed. Opposing him was a virile, powerful man.

"I'm a goin' for a little trip out o' town," said Solomon, wheezily. Hassan appeared and said a few words, producing a letter. Solomon handed it to Warden. "There you be, sir—and if I ain't mistook, something werry interestin' is 'appenin' in the courtyard."

Such was their farewell. Warden and North reached the courtyard, where a car was awaiting with Ahmed ben Zain as chauffeur. At one side, a huge truck was standing, and from it a number of porters were carefully lifting a mammoth packing case.

"What the devil is that, and what did he mean?" asked North, irritated.

Warden shrugged and got into the Hispano. Later, however, in the moment when John Solomon was utterly broken, trapped, facing destruction, Warden was to recall the incident.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Banning's loud-mouthed triumph stung far more than the cash he took

Sure-Thing Bets

The trouble with the Blue Rock Golf Club was—Al Banning; and he certainly made life noisy, miserable and costly for the other golfers until—

By HAROLD MONTANYE

IT all happened because of the summer membership rules at the Blue Rock Golf and Country Club. Under the summer membership clause we admit almost any one who is properly proposed and seconded. Provided, of course, that he is a summer resident of Sound View. The club makes a pretty little penny and nobody is hurt except the fairways—usually.

Blue Rock is just like most golf clubs. We have several foursomes that are made up of wealthy old pirates who can be found obstructing the course on any clear day during the summer. They all play terrible golf, they have never played any better and they never will. Then we have three foursomes—yours truly is a member of one of them—who can play pretty fair golf. We occasionally manage to drop the ball in the customary eighteen holes with as few as 76 strokes. Then we have a half dozen men and two or three strong-armed women who play around alone. And after that comes the majority of the club. They can all be safely trusted to not break 120—and some wouldn't admit, on oath, how many strokes they had taken.

A couple of our tees overlook the Sound. We have a dance every Saturday night, and the music is awful. Most of our playing members are men over forty, who get a lot of fun out of the game; and we don't go in much for heavy gambling. That is why Albert Baily Banning didn't fit.

You can't teach old dogs new tricks or old turtles how to swim on their backs. It just can't be done.

We first became aware that Banning was one of us on a Saturday afternoon the early part of last summer. It was about two o'clock and the ones who weren't out on the course had already arranged their matches.

I was dressing and kidding with Pete Barrett and Charlie Rapp and Mike Porter the pro.

We're all dressing and kidding one another and laying small bets when the locker room door opens and in comes Mr. Banning. He is a big fellow, about six feet and weighs around a hundred and ninety. He is about twenty-seven or eight, with close-cropped black hair and a square chin and blue eyes; one of those fellows who look as though they could tame a cage of mountain lions. There was a wide grin on his map, and he sort of swaggered like a big buck coon with a new yellow vest.

He closed the door behind him with a bang and dropped his golf bag on the floor and shouted, "Come here, you big black hyena!"

George, the major domo of the locker room, looked startled, and then he began to grin, because he is used to having people kid him.

"TAKE these clubs," said Mr. Banning, "and find me a locker and get me a dozen balls and some cracked ice and ginger ale and enough glasses to give all the boys a chance to drink with Al Banning. After we drink I'll teach them how to play golf."

There was a moment of amazed silence and then a buzz of conversation as every one politely ignored him. We weren't sure whether he was one of our new summer drunks or whether he just didn't know any better. We aren't snobbish over at Blue Rock, but, after all, we don't like to have new members rush us off our feet.

After a moment I took another peek at him and saw that he wore a pink shirt and a salmon-colored necktie, black and white stockings, and a greenish-brown golf suit with big red checks. He looked a little like something that might have slipped in from Hollywood overnight. There certainly wasn't anything that suggested that he had a retiring nature.

"Yassuh," said George. "Yassuh. Raght ovah heah, suh. Heah's a fine lockah, suh, all clean and braight and shiny, suh."

"It better be clean and bright and shiny," said Mr. Banning.

Charlie Rapp—he was always a blunt sort of idiot, for all that we knew he was a good-hearted egg underneath—turned around and looked Banning over from head to foot. Then he called George and said, "Open a window. There's something wrong with the atmosphere in here." I don't know whether he intended Banning to hear.

Two or three people had the bad manners to laugh. Banning instantly turned the color of his shirt; and I must say in his behalf that he called Charlie, faster than any one else present could think or act. It was a dumb and impolite thing for Charlie to have done—though most of us forgave him after we knew Banning better.

"Do you mean me?" he barked, sticking out his chin.

Charlie smiled at him and nodded his head and reached for his golf pants as though the conversation was finished. But it wasn't. Mr. Banning had something more to say

"Well, listen, you bald-headed old bag of bones," he began. Charlie is bald, and is plenty sensitive about it. "If you weren't already doddering toward a boneyard I'd flatten out your nose so that you wouldn't be able to tell one smell from another."

Charlie's face turned crimson and he got to his feet. Mike Porter shoved in between them as some of the crowd began to laugh and cheer.

"Clear out the locker room, George," somebody shouted. "Battling Wahoo against Old Warhorse Rapp. Fifteen rounds. Both members of this club. Winner take all."

Banning whirled around and swept the room with a nasty sneer.

"What a nice, homey little crowd," he said. "How did anybody manage to collect so many clucks in one place? Birds of a feather, and I'll bet anything you'll cover that not one of you can shoot the course in par. I came in here to get acquainted with all the 'regular fellows' that Dan Gifford told me I would find at the Blue Rock. If there's one here, will he please put up his hand and I'll apologize."

Nice boy, Mr. Banning, for all that Charlie had been pretty rough.

It wouldn't have taken anything stronger than a breeze from a flick of a rabbit's tail to have knocked over every one in that locker room. And I would have fallen first, because I realized now that I had seconded his application, sight unseen, on Dan's O K.

Some of the boys still hold it against me. But it was pure accident. Young Dan Gifford came to me and said that one of his wealthy customers, a man named Banning, had taken the Van Riper house for the summer. Would I second his application? I would and I did.

AFTER looking Mr. Banning over I hated to admit it, but there wasn't anything else for me to do. I went over and introduced myself and explained to him that we hadn't meant to be rude. I told him that Charlie Rapp was our club wit and was just trying to be funny.

"You better get a new wit," Banning said, but he grinned; and he went over to Charlie and apologized. Charlie shook hands with him, but the look that Charlie gave me would have scared a Fifth Avenue traffic cop off his corner.

I introduced Banning to the rest of the crowd in the locker room. That is, I introduced him to the ones who couldn't escape because they didn't have their pants on.

They all took one of Banning's drinks and tried to be friendly. He reciprocated by giving them all a smack on the back that nearly knocked their teeth out—and how he laughed! I could see that they all liked him and that he was going to be popular. Like a polecat!

But I stood my ground and took Mike Porter to one side and asked him if he minded Banning taking his place for the afternoon. Mike grinned.

"All right with me," he said. "I hope you boys have a nice afternoon." He went away laughing.

We didn't say anything to Banning about our usual bet of a dollar a hole. We didn't want to rob him. But when we got out on the first tee he wanted to know what we usually played for,

and Charlie Rapp snapped him up and said a dollar a hole.

"Pikers, eh?" Banning comes back. "How about two dollars?"

"Make it five," Charlie growled, and he gave me another of those affectionate glances. Pete Barrett and I agreed that it was all right with us. We were certain that we would come in with Mr. Banning's shirt. We consoled our consciences by telling ourselves that he needed to be taken down a peg or two.

All of which proves that you shouldn't count heads before the ax falls.

What Banning did to us that afternoon is history at the Blue Rock Golf and Country Club. He separated us from a total of one hundred and twenty dollars, and he did it so loudly and so boisterously that the whole club knew about it. We took our medicine. We even managed to grin at the remarks that were made by the rest of the crowd. But we didn't forget.

The peculiar part of it was that it didn't teach the rest of the members a lesson. They let Banning goad or bluff them into matches. He offered ridiculous handicaps, but he won money from every member who would play with him. And some of us—I was one of them—went back for more.

I couldn't understand how he could beat me. He had the knack of being able to nurse a sucker along and make him feel that the next day he would win. But no one could ever win money from him. He was clever—and how he loved to trim somebody!

HE wasn't particular whom he robbed, either. There was his bet with that big, good-natured cub Jimmie Weed, for instance.

Young Jimmie is the son of Harmon Weed, one of our charter members. Jimmie just finished college a year ago this spring. He and little Mary Dewart have lived in the same block and fought with and for one another since they were babies. While Jimmie was in college, every one sort of took it for granted that when he was through they would be married.

All the women at the club sat around on the porch and talked about how nice and romantic it was because Jimmie and Mary had been sweethearts from childhood. They even speculated on whether old man Weed would build them a house or whether they would rent one.

It must have made Mary mad, because no girl likes to have her husband picked out for her. I think that all that talk was what started her running around with Banning. How she could bear him, no one could understand; but she did, and even appeared to like it. He had lots of money and a couple of big cars, and he certainly did entertain her. I suppose he was quieter, with her.

Some of the old tabbies on the club porch said that she was throwing Jimmie down for Banning's money. I never did think that. Anyway, when Jimmie came home with his sheepskin under his arm and that wide grin on his face he got quite a shock. He found that Mr. Albert Baily Banning was occupying his favorite chair on the Dewart front porch and most of Mary's time. Jimmie kept on grinning as though he knew that it couldn't last, but I could tell that he was pretty much broken up about it.

And Mary Dewart is something to be broken up about. Maybe I can draw you a quick picture of her: Violet eyes and blue-black hair, and coloring like those pretty Irish colleens you read about. She has the neatest ankles and

feet and legs I have ever seen, and I've noticed quite a few in my day.

What a picture she made at the Saturday night dances with her eyes sparkling, her smile flashing, her cheeks slightly flushed! Young, eager, and sort of breathless!

The only thing that spoiled the picture was Banning. He was as noticeable as a lame neck, with his loud mouth and his flashy clothes, offering to bet on anything and everything.

Banning resented Jimmie. That was only natural, because Jimmie had the run of the Dewart house, and Jimmie couldn't help showing that he was crazy about Mary. And Mary, the little minx, would play up to Jimmie to get Banning's goat, and vice versa. It was pretty tough on Jimmie.

I saw Mary and Jimmie sitting on the club porch one afternoon watching the play on the last hole. After a few minutes up walks Banning. He smiled at Mary and nodded to Jimmie and said: "I have my new car out here. Want to try it?"

Of course they both got up and started toward the steps. When they got to the end of the porch Banning turned to Jimmie and said: "Sorry, but there is only room for two."

That's the kind Banning is.

Jimmie turned crimson and I saw his fist clench, but he grinned like the good sport he is and told them to run along. He didn't hear me call to him when he came back.

The funny part of it was that Jimmie always stood up for Banning when we started to ride him. He loved Mary so much that if she thought Banning was all right he must be all right. Imagine that?

Every time Banning had a chance to give Jimmie a dirty dig or make him uncomfortable he did it. Jimmie took it all good-naturedly. He was so damn' good-natured about it that sometimes I wanted to kick him.

THEN one afternoon Banning got him in the locker room and goaded him into making a bet. It was robbery, pure and simple.

"Weed," he said, "a fellow with your shoulders ought to make a golfer."

"I never play," Jimmie said. "I tried it a few times and I'm pretty bad. Too many hands and feet."

Every one laughed because Jimmie has the biggest hands and feet I have ever seen. They came in rather handy, though, while he was playing tackle on the varsity up at Dartmouth and batting four hundred on the baseball team.

"Maybe it's your head that's in the way," Banning said, kind of nasty-like. None of us mistook that for friendly kidding.

"Oh, I guess not," Jimmie said casually; but I saw a funny little glint in his eyes, and I said to myself that Banning was getting close to the limit.

"Got any clubs?" Banning went on.

"Broke 'em all the last time I played," Jimmie said.

"Well," said Banning, and he scratched his head, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll furnish you with some clubs, and I'll give you three strokes for every one I take. I'll bet you fifty dollars."

We all perked up our ears at that, and we urged Jimmie to take him on. We should have kept out of it, but we were all sore at Banning; and a man who had never had a club in his hands before could win that bet.

"I guess not," said Jimmie, laughing at our insistence.

"Well," Banning sneered, "I'm so

anxious to see you use these particular clubs that I'll give you a set-up. You use these clubs that I furnish and I'll allow you four strokes to my one and I'll lay you a hundred against fifty. If you've got any nerve at all you'll take it. Are you game?"

That was Banning's system. He would goad people into bets against their will and better judgment. We all watched Jimmie. He was sitting with his hands clasped around one knee, and he looked as though he were going to make one of those famous lunges that had always carried him through the opposing line and into the secondary defense. But he didn't. He studied Banning for a moment, and then he said quietly: "I'll take it."

Banning grinned and nodded his head and said that he would go and get the clubs. We all crowded around Jimmie and began to give him advice. It seemed that he couldn't lose, and we were all delighted. We had never had the pleasure of seeing Banning lose any money. We couldn't understand why he had offered such a sucker bet. It wasn't like him.

He was only gone a few minutes. When he reappeared he had a new bag and he had eight clubs in it. Jimmie looked at them and nodded his head and went over to his locker.

And then I saw Charlie Rapp getting purple in the face, and he was pointing at the bag of clubs and trying to speak. Banning began to laugh that hyena laugh of his, and we all took another look. Finally Charlie managed to stop spluttering.

"They're — they're left-handed clubs!" he growled.

"Sure they are, Sherlock," Banning said, and he threw back his head and roared until the tears ran down his cheeks.

Jimmie came over and looked at the clubs and we all held our breath. We even anticipated what was coming. This would be a show-down. There were about fifteen respectable, middle-aged men there, and we all hoped that Jimmie was going to poke him in the nose. But he didn't. He looked at Banning for a moment and then he reached for his wallet and took out a check and borrowed a fountain pen and made a check out to Banning for fifty dollars. We were all pretty much disgusted with him at the time; but Jimmie had more poise and sense than all of the rest of us put together.

"You'd *take* that money?" Charlie Rapp said to Banning.

Something in the way he said it drove the laughter from Banning's lips.

"Sure I'd take it," he said. "You all thought he was going to take my hundred on a cinch bet. He would have taken the money."

He tried to laugh again, but it was pretty much forced. We couldn't any of us find a place to look. It was just not decent, that business.

NO one would have anything to do with him after that. That is no one but Mary Dewart. I don't know whether she was told; maybe she didn't believe it. They always played around together, and when they weren't playing he was giving her lessons or driving her around the country in one of those big cars. It made all of us a little sick.

It was one afternoon about a month later that Charlie Rapp and I were sitting on the club porch sipping from a couple of tall glasses. Banning and Mary were over on the practice green, and he was dropping putts from every place but behind his ear. We watched

them for a while, and finally Charlie gave vent to his wrath.

"Look at that big-mouthed, four-flushing crook," he exploded. It is entertaining to see Charlie get mad. He does it so thoroughly. "It's an outrage. How can she stand having him around?"

"He has a lot of money," I said, wanting to see Charlie get purple. None of us who knew Mary believed that; but if I could get Charlie mad enough he might really do something about it. He snorted.

"She's not after his money. She's infatuated with the big baboon. She's really in love with Jimmie. I don't know what the difference is. Most people don't know until after they're married whether they were really in love or only infatuated. Maybe he has a couple of good traits even if we've never seen 'em; and he must be able to cover up a lot of the nasty ones when he's with her. I'd like to have her see him in the locker room. He's just a crook. Look at the way he stole that fifty dollars from Jimmie. A dirty trick bet."

"Why don't you do something about it?" I said.

I feel that I deserve a little of the credit for what happened after that. It may have helped to set Charlie to thinking.

After a while I got up and went over to the locker room. Charlie was sitting talking with Jimmie Weed; and a few minutes later Banning came in. He stopped in front of Jimmie and laughed.

"Want to take me on for another bet?"

Jimmie grinned gamely and shook his head. I could see that it was all the boy could do to keep himself from starting a fight there in the clubhouse.

"Next time," says Banning, "I'll allow you three strokes to my one, and I'll lay you two hundred to one hundred."

"And you'll furnish the clubs?" said Jimmie sarcastically.

There wasn't a blush in that nice lad Banning.

"Nope," he said. "You can furnish your own equipment."

Charlie sat there with a face like a thundercloud. I spoke to him two or three times and he didn't even hear me. It was very evident that he had something on his mind besides the bald spot Banning had sneered about.

Suddenly Charlie slapped his hand down on the table and he took Jimmie by the arm and dragged him over into a corner. I saw Jimmie shaking his head and then he began to laugh and Charlie sat there arguing and pleading like an old lady hanging over a back fence.

When they came back Charlie was grinning like a monkey and Jimmie was looking a little doubtful. They sat down and we all talked until Banning came by again. Jimmie called to him.

"Oh, Banning," he said.

"Yeah?" Banning answered with just a trace of a sneer in his voice. It was evident that the idiot thought Jimmie was afraid of him. He couldn't understand how a gentleman would think and act.

"YOU say that you will allow me three strokes to a hole, and I can furnish my own equipment?" Jimmie said slowly.

"It has gone down," Banning sneered. "It's two to my one. You've got to think fast to play with me."

"I'll say so," Charlie put in. "Don't take him unless you have a referee. If

you don't have a referee he'll gyp you."

"What do you mean by that?" Banning said, and he stuck out his chin. I think I would have hit it myself if I had been a little younger.

"Just what I said," Charlie flung back at him. "There ought to be a referee to decide arguments in such a match, with you. There ought to be some one whose word is final on everything."

"Let him get three if he wants to," Banning said.

"All right," said Jimmie. "I'll take you for your two hundred to my one. I furnish my own *equipment.* You allow me two strokes to your one. We'll get old man Perkins to referee. He will make the final decision on everything. All right?"

"All right with me," said Banning. "When shall we shoot it?"

"Day after to-morrow at two o'clock," Charlie said.

"Who's playing this?" Banning sneered.

"You are," said Charlie sweetly. "And I would like to lay a hundred to your two that Jimmie takes you like Tunney took Dempsey."

"I'll cover that," said Banning, "and I'll shear any other little lamb that wants a slice."

"I'll take a hundred to fifty," Pete Barrett said. I could see that Pete was betting, not because he thought Jimmie would win, but because he wanted him to.

"He allows Jimmie two strokes for every one he takes, and Jimmie furnishes his own *equipment,"* Charlie said loudly enough for the whole locker room to hear. Banning sneered each time they mentioned the word "equipment." He thought that they were riding him about the fifty dollars he stole from Jimmie. But they weren't. Charlie wanted to be sure that the word "equipment" was understood by every one.

"Old man Perkins is to be the referee, and his word is final on everything pertaining to the match," Charlie went on. "That right, Banning?"

"Right," said Banning; and they all wrote checks and posted them in the club safe.

HALF the playing members of the club were on the first tee at two o'clock two days later. They were all hoping that Jimmie's ball would sprout wings and a rudder. But no one believed in miracles. That is, no one but Charlie Rapp. He came over from the clubhouse with Jimmie, and he was grinning all over his homely map. I heard Charlie say:

"Keep your head down and keep your eye on the ball, and don't look up until after you've counted three. The first one to crack will lose, and you've got to show this big bum that you've got more inside you than all his ancestors."

Mary Dewart was there with Banning. When Jimmie saw her his face became a bright crimson, and he began to perspire. He knew that Banning had brought her so that she could see him make a fool of himself. I saw Jimmie's lips tighten and that peculiar glint came into his eyes. I hoped that he would get mad enough to take Banning and then break both of his legs.

It was somewhat later that I learned that Charlie Rapp had persuaded Mary to come see the match. I also found out that he had spent a day and a half teaching Jimmie how to use a midiron and a putter. But that is getting a little ahead of things as they happened.

Charlie Rapp had a grin on his face

that wouldn't come off. It certainly belied the fact that he was about to pay Banning a hundred dollars. It isn't like Charlie to lose a hundred dollars and grin about it. I wondered what the old pirate had up his sleeve. I was talking with old man Perkins when Charlie came over.

"Just be open-minded, Pop," Charlie said. "Remember that Jimmie is allowed to furnish his own *equipment,* and use it as he sees fit. Banning agreed to that, you know. Your word is final on everything, and don't forget that he stole fifty dollars from Jimmie on a trick bet about equipment."

"I'll not ever forget it," Pop Perkins said. "And I won't ever forget the forty Banning took away from me."

When I heard that I began to see the light of day. Old man Perkins is the club tightwad. How Banning got forty dollars away from him is another story. I understood now why Charlie had picked him for referee.

Banning teed up his ball, took a practice swing, wagged the head of his club above the ball a half dozen times, and swung. It was a tremendous tee shot that cleared the hill on the other side of the second brook and went rolling straight down the fairway. There was a murmur of applause that died away as Banning turned and sneered at Jimmie and laughed.

Jimmie's ears became red and his nervousness increased as he got ready to drive.

But the thing that delighted me was the surprised and hurt way Mary Dewart looked at Banning after he had sneered at Jimmie. Evidently Banning had kept that disagreeable laugh under cover when Mary was around.

Jimmie teed up his ball, stepped away and took three practice swings and then took his stance. He pressed the sole of his club lightly against the ball and brought his club back slowly, slowly enough to suit any one. But at the top of his swing he faltered and the result was a short, jerky lunge at the ball. There is a brook about twenty yards in front of the first tee at Blue Rock. Jimmie's ball skipped along the grass and plopped into the middle of it.

BANNING turned loose that sweet laugh of his again and said:

"Well, you made the first hazard all right."

The audience groaned and turned toward the clubhouse. They didn't have the heart to follow such a massacre. But Charlie Rapp was still grinning.

"Stick around," he called to them. "This is going to be good before it's over."

Banning was on the green in three, his ball lying two feet from the cup. Jimmie picked up his ball after he had sliced into some tall grass and had used five strokes to get out.

The next two holes were duplicates of the first, with Jimmie picking up his ball before he even got on the green. The only thing that Jimmie was winning was a lot of sympathy.

On the way to the fourth tee Charlie Rapp came over and said to Pop Perkins: "It will be different from here on."

"You've certainly gone optimistic," I said sarcastically. "He doesn't have a chance. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for getting the kid into this."

"Just keep your undies on and don't forget that trick bet that Banning won from Jimmie," Charlie said and he hurried away.

While Banning was teeing up his ball I saw Mary looking at Jimmie and

something about the way she was looking at him gave me a thrill. Jimmie was taking a licking, but he was taking it like a man. I guess it was the first time that Mary ever had a chance to get Banning and Jimmie together and make comparisons.

I caught a glance of Charlie Rapp and he was watching Mary also. Suddenly it began to percolate through my dusty brain that Charlie hadn't been as dumb as he acted. I wanted to go over and give the old pirate a sip out of my flask in sheer gratitude, but I decided to wait and see what happened.

Banning's fourth drive was just like the previous three, a long, low screamer with a top spin that kept the ball rolling after it struck the ground.

When Jimmie got up from the bench and walked over to tee up his ball there was a gasp and then a roar of laughter from the gallery. In his hand he had a round curtain rod about three and a half feet long. He pushed it into the ground so that it stuck up a little above his waist line, and set his ball on top of it. Banning stood there with his eyes popping and his mouth opening and closing like the mouth of a fish that has just been hooked.

Jimmie walked back over to the bench and his caddie pulled a baseball bat out of the bag and handed it to him. One side of the bat had been whittled down so that it had a flat surface. We all doubled up with laughter. We couldn't help it.

I don't know whether Banning knew that Jimmie batted over four hundred every year he was on the varsity at Dartmouth. But we all knew it. The New York Giants made him an offer during his junior year, but he turned it down because of Mary. He could handle a baseball bat the way Banning handled a driver.

He squared off beside the high-teed ball and spread his feet apart. It was then that Banning began to roar.

"Hey, what the hell is this, a circus?" he bellowed, purple in the face. "He can't use that baseball bat."

"Why can't he?" Charlie Rapp wanted to know. "You agreed to let him furnish his own *equipment*. That, you probably remember, is your own word. A baseball bat is a lot fairer than the left-handed clubs you picked out for him when you sto—took fifty dollars away from him. His ball is teed on the kind of a tee he wants to use, and he is going to use a wooden club."

"Go sit in your corner, stupid," Banning growled and he certainly looked mean. I gave a hasty glance at Mary. She was watching Banning as though he was some one she had never seen before.

"Go ahead, Jimmie," Charlie said.

"Be yourself," Banning snapped and he stepped in front of Jimmie's ball.

"HOW about it, Pop?" Charlie said to Pop Perkins. I saw Pop gulp. He didn't know what to say. But while Pop hesitated, Banning unknowingly made up Pop's mind for him. Pop is the kind of man that won't take advice. He goes his own sweet way and makes his own mistakes. Of course Banning didn't know that, and he did just the thing that I hoped he would do. He walked over in front of Pop and stuck his chin into Pop's face.

"How about it, grandpop?" he said nastily.

Pop Perkins glared.

"Objection overruled," he said sweetly and I could see that Pop got more than a little satisfaction out of it.

"There is nothing in the rules of this match to prevent him from using any kind of club that he wishes to use."

"So it's a frame-up, is it?" Banning sneered.

"Go on and play and stop belly-aching," Pete Barrett said. Every one began to snicker at Banning, and Mary went over and pulled at his sleeve and laughed up into his face, trying to make him see it in the right way. He jerked his arm away from her and went stalking over to the bench. I didn't dare look at Jimmie.

When Jimmie hits a baseball, it stays hit. He drove a long, low ball that struck in front of Banning's and rolled about forty yards. It would have been a home run in any ball park in the country.

He was in position to use a midiron and make the green in two shots. But he played carefully and took three and rolled his ball up within six feet of the cup. Banning was on in three, but he took two putts to sink his ball and Jimmie's two putts won the hole.

From then on things began to reverse themselves. Banning played beautiful golf, but Jimmie won five of the first ten holes. Most of the holes at Blue Rock are par fours. Banning was playing them all in par or one over. That two strokes to one arrangement made his scores eights and tens, and gave Jimmie from seven to nine strokes to win.

They were all square again on the fifteenth tee, and it was Banning's honor. He got away another terrific drive. Jimmie's ball was a little high and when it struck the ground it stuck into the turf. He was lying about thirty yards back of Banning in a little gully. We all groaned—but we had forgotten about Charlie Rapp.

Charlie spoke to one of the caddies who were following along watching the play. There were about six of them and each of them had a paper bundle. All of them hurried on ahead and formed a sort of huddle near Jimmie's ball.

When Jimmie got ready to take his next shot his caddie took the curtain rod out of his bag and stuck it in the ground and Jimmie put his ball on top of it.

"Stop the comedy," Banning snapped.

Jimmie bowed, grinned and pointed behind him.

We all turned and our eyes nearly popped out of our heads. There was a "Ground Under Repair" sign stuck up on the side of the gully. We all knew that the sign hadn't been there five minutes before, but it was certainly very much in evidence now.

Banning made a howl to Pop Perkins while we all kidded him. Pop shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"There's the sign," Pop said. "You also have the privilege of teeing up your ball."

Jimmie took his stance and smacked the ball within fifty feet of the green. Banning took a brassie and made a vicious swing at the ball—and sliced it out of bounds. Mary was standing near him and I saw her face go scarlet as they watched the ball disappear into a tangle of vines and bushes. He must have used some pretty strong language and part of it must have been directed at Mary because she walked away from him and went on to the green alone.

Jimmie took the fifteenth and the sixteenth and things looked bad for Banning. But he was still fighting for his money. He went up to the seventeenth tee with a face like a thundercloud and he offered to bet Pete Barrett a hundred dollars that he would take

the next two holes. Pete laughed at him and waved him away.

THE seventeenth at Blue Rock is a water hole. The tee is on the side of a hill and the green is a little over a hundred yards away—a hundred and fifteen, to be exact. The green is completely surrounded by sand traps and bunkers. It is a par three hole, but you've got to pitch your mashie or mashie-niblick shot on the green or you will be fortunate to get a five or six.

It is a tough hole, but I knew that Banning usually made a three.

Jimmie teed up his ball on top of the curtain rod and studied the distance. Then he brought the bat back slowly and tapped the ball. It rose, cleared the pond and dropped thirty feet short of the green, in the sand trap.

A groan of dismay went up from the gallery. We knew that he didn't have a chance to pitch his ball out of the sand. It would have taken a star to make a four; and many a veteran golfer could not make a five. He was at least fifty feet from the cup with an almost impossible lay.

Banning added to our discomfiture when he made a perfect mashie shot and dropped his ball on the far side of the green and about twenty feet from the cup. He had a sure three. I expected to see Jimmie pick up his ball. But he didn't.

On the way across the bridge he talked to his caddie and when we got over beside him the six caddies were unwrapping their bundles. Each of them contained several lengths of drain pipe. While the gallery went into hysterics they pieced the lengths together. No one was quite sure what they were going to do until the caddies placed one end of the pipe directly in front of Jimmie's ball and then they fitted an elbow on the other end and stuck it down into the cup.

We all watched Banning. He was standing on the green trying desperately to control his rage. He knew that if he questioned Jimmie's contraption that Pop Perkins would uphold Jimmie.

For a moment I almost felt sorry for him. And then I thought of all the mean, petty devices he had used to play on people's decency and self-respect, goading them into matches so that he could win their money. He was getting a dose of his own medicine and he wasn't man enough to stand the gaff.

When Jimmie stepped up to his ball with a putter Banning looked at Charlie Rapp and he said: "If he sinks that putt, some one is going to get a poke in the nose."

Charlie grinned.

"You won't bust anybody in the nose," he said, and I could see that Charlie Rapp was aching to have him try it.

The pipe slanted upward to the green at an angle of about twenty-five degrees.

It didn't seem possible that any one could hit the ball hard enough to drive it up through the pipe to the top of the bunker so that it could coast down into the cup on the other side.

We all held our breaths while Jimmie brought his putter back and up. He clipped the ball a clean shot and it disappeared into the mouth of the pipe. With almost the same motion Jimmie dropped his putter and picked up the end of the pipe and held it above his head.

We heard the ball clatter merrily through the pipe and we heard it plop

into the cup and then we heard another noise. It was Banning.

"He can't do that," he roared. "He—"

"Shut up and take your medicine like a man," Charlie Rapp shouted above Banning's roar. "He didn't touch the ball with his hands after he hit it. If you—"

But Charlie didn't get any further because he had to protect himself. Banning went charging at him, his face livid with rage. Charlie ducked and poked Banning a stout one in the stomach with his left.

It was quite a fight while it lasted. Charlie took one on the side of the head that would have bowled over an ox, but he went back for more and managed to lay one on the end of Banning's nose that sounded as though Jimmie had hit him with the baseball bat.

Charlie may be bald, but he certainly isn't doddering toward any graveyard. Banning had coined the phrase; and he certainly helped to uncoin it.

Charlie closed one of Banning's eyes and altered the contour of his nose before we could pry them apart. We rather hated to stop the thing when we saw how the battle was going. But after all we're respectable, middle-aged people over at the Blue Rock, and we don't like to get into the papers.

WHEN we got them pried apart, Banning took a bee-line for the locker room. He didn't stop to ask any further questions about the legality of Jimmie's putting contrivance.

No one will ever know what decision Pop Perkins would have made in the matter, and no one has ever dared to ask him.

That was the last of Mr. Banning. No one has seen him since. Most of our members think that he got just what he deserved, though some of the old conservatives who don't know the whole truth think that Charlie Rapp should be dropped for "sharp practice."

In my opinion Charlie should get a cup for the greatest service to the club during that summer.

The nice part about the old conservatives is that they forget quickly, and will soon have something else to grumble over.

And, of course, they take into consideration the fact that Charlie and Jimmie and Pete Barrett contributed the five hundred they took from Banning toward a fund to improve the clubhouse.

Oh, yes, I saw Mary Dewart walking back from the seventeenth green with Jimmie that afternoon. It certainly gave me a thrill. Jimmie was grinning like the great big overgrown cub that he is and Mary was looking up into his eyes and—but here's a copy of an invitation I got in the mail a few days ago:

Mr. and Mrs. Fenimore Campbell Dewart
request the honour of your presence
at the marriage of their daughter
Mary Elizabeth
to
Mr. James Harmon Weed
Saturday, the 15th of June
at four o'clock
Trinity Church
Sound View, Connecticut

Personally I think they ought to add a line to the invitation. Something like this:

"By arrangement of Charles Elmore Rapp."

THE END.

"There's his smoke!" he gasped in horror

A Man from the Bad Lands

Wes Twitchell's "smoke" starts war between cowmen and nesters on the Buffalo range—and casts Taterleg Wilson in a perilous rôle

By GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Author of "Tophet at Trails End," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TATERLEG WILSON, late camp cook for various Bad Lands cow outfits, has come to the Buffalo range, to find a war between the cowmen and the independents—nesters, sheep men, grangers, and, the cowmen claim, rustlers. He prevents his new boss, Colonel Beal Twitchell, czar of the range, from shooting the sheep men's unarmed emissary, Austin Brady. Twitchell tries to force Taterleg to kill Brady, and Taterleg, outwitting him, throws in with the independents.

The cowmen demand that if the nesters are innocent, they catch the real rustlers. Taterleg, on a wild guess, goes courting Myrta Dolson, free and easy but kind-hearted daughter of the shiftless moonshiner Park Dolson. For Dolson's is a hang-out for the cowmen; and Taterleg thinks it queer that Dolson has forgiven Twitchell and the other cowmen for hiring Texas gunmen, who killed Dolson's boy in mistake for himself. Wes Twitchell, the colonel's mean son, is still Myrta's most favored admirer.

This story began in the Argosy for February 1.

Taterleg's story of a fight with Brady is accepted, and he ends up by riding from Dolson's—where Myrta protected him from being robbed—with a rustler, Ches, and some cattle. They find two bodies by a deserted camp; Park Dolson had killed the Texas gunmen!

At the rustlers' camp, Taterleg hears that one "Ace-High"—who proves to be Wes Twitchell—is going to make a "smoke" in the rangeland that will cover the rustlers' final and greatest raid. Taterleg gets some papers, which he hopes include the one the rustlers mentioned, with "A Number One's" signature—real or forged—which acts as a passport across the range for them.

Then, knocking out the rustler Powers, Taterleg holds up another, Wallace, and rides toward Brady's. But Powers recovers, and with Wes Twitchell pursues Taterleg. The bow-legged camp cook has to leave his captive and flee on Wallace's horse.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS FOR THE SHERIFF.

BRADY had been opposed to his partner's expedition from the moment Taterleg outlined his design. He had spent anxious hours during his partner's absence. Men of their training and habit of life are not demonstrative, except under the urge of most trivial and frothy emotions. When something of large importance comes their way, be it loss or gain, sorrow or relief, they merely shake hands and grin at each other like embarrassed boys. That was what Brady and Taterleg did when the little bow-legged man dismounted at the door.

"Well, sir," said Taterleg, when the first brief greetings were done, "I caught me as purty a speciment of a rustler as you ever set your eyes on, but I bungled my hand and had to let him go.

"This horse was his until I had to swap that old holy roller of mine for it to save my livers. And this here gun belonged to that man. His name was Wallace, but I don't know whether it was his first name or his last."

Brady was almost dumb with amazement over his partner's single-handed success, incontestable proof of which he had brought back with him. For the paper upon which Taterleg had built such towering hope was exactly what his knowledge of cow country ways had led him to believe. It was a blanket bill of sale, written on Beal Twitchell's letterhead, with blank spaces for the number of cattle before each listed brand.

The Circle BT was included along with several other brands, the three which Taterleg had helped drive away from Dolson's among them. It was such a bill of sale as a cattle buyer would take from the seller, made out to "Judson Hanawalt," signed with the name of Beal Twitchell. Whether the signature was genuine Brady did not know, never having seen the old man's. Judson Hanawalt must be the name that either Wallace or Wes Twitchell did business under when transporting the stolen cattle across the range, and disposing of them to buyers in the north.

Brady declared it made little difference whether that was the old man's signature or a forgery by his son; it was enough to hang both of them if put into the hands of a cowmen's committee. But Taterleg seemed to be a little downcast after eating his dinner and thinking the situation over.

"I tell you, Austin," he said, "I nearly wish now I never set hands on that paper. I feel so danged ashamed for that kid I could nearly burn it. Robbin' even the old man, and carryin' it on under his name! It's the low-downest trick I ever knew a cowman's son to throw."

"I wouldn't be surprised if we find out the old man's got a hand in it himself," Brady said.

"Hell! He wouldn't be stealin' his own cows."

"I wouldn't be too sure. He's got them plastered with mortgages so thick they have to scrape 'em to read the brand. I wouldn't put it past the old cuss to play this rustler dodge, cleaning up all he can that way before the crash comes."

"Stealin' his own cows from the fellers that hold his mortgage paper, heh?"

"IT smells mighty suspicious to me. He couldn't ship without a bank representative along to make the collection. I've got it straight that he's plastered paper on his herd from two, and in some cases three, different banks. I don't suppose that's crooked as long as the people lending the money are willing, but a blind man can see the old man's equity in that outfit isn't an inch wide. If he can sneak them off to Jackson's Hole and sell them for even twenty or twenty-five dollars a head, he's that much to the good."

"But that's a speciment of plain robbery, ain't it?"

"Plain as daylight."

"If we could hang it on the old cuss we'd sure notch his tail."

"Right up to the handle."

"But where does this hirin' Texas men to shoot us nesters up come in if the old man knows dam' well we ain't guilty? What kind of a stall was that?"

"No stall about it. Twitchell lays the decline of his prosperity to us homesteaders fencin' off his winter range. As far as Dolson's concerned, I believe old Twitchell wanted him killed for what he knows, rather than anything he's done. Anyway, Twitchell didn't go a lone hand in hiring those shooters; he just picked them. All the cowmen around here chipped in to pay them for their dirty work."

"Well, they got some pay they wasn't out to collect, anyway." Taterleg then told of finding their bodies, and the evidence that pointed to Dolson. "Old man Dolson's ridin' that boy Wes to a frazzle. He's got something on that boy, if not the whole outfit; you said it right. Dolson's in that game for money, and he's gittin' it, but whatever that girl Myrta is doin' she's doin' for love."

"For Wes, you mean?"

"He's mammy's little white-headed man around that place. Well, she done me a good and friendly turn, keepin' her old pa and them cowhands from friskin' that thirty-five dollars off of me. If I can ever turn a trick to pay her back, I'm the man to do it."

"You're the man to pay off any kind of a debt, old feller, good or bad," Brady said. "But the next question is, what are we going to do with this evidence you've captured?"

"Whichever way we jump, we've got to jump fast," Taterleg advised. "I forgot to mention to you what I heard them fellers say about Wes startin' a smoke to make his big clean-up and git-away under."

In his prolix style Taterleg laid the particulars of that overheard conversation before his friend. Brady didn't think very much of it, although he

agreed with Taterleg that, if Wes pulled off anything of that kind at all, it would be against the nesters. Brady was of the opinion that the cowmen were not ready for a concentrated move against them.

"It 'd be a cinch we'd ruin our case if we went to Twitchell," Taterleg ruminated.

Brady agreed. "I think we'd better put our cards on the table before the sheriff, and leave it to him. He can pick up a posse of cowmen and cut Wes off before he gets halfway to Jackson's Hole—catch him with the goods in his hands."

TATERLEG couldn't dismiss lightly the thought of Wes Twitchell's smoke. He was so deeply convinced of impending danger to the settlement that he was reluctant to leave their possessions unguarded, although taking that evidence to the sheriff was not a one-man job. That gang would be alert to cut off any such move; whoever rode on that business would ride with his life in his hands.

Taterleg decided at last that both must go, putting their horses through to make it to Buffalo before dark. They would rest over the night and hit the road for home with the first streak of day. In the meantime, the neighbors would know how to take care of themselves, as they had done in the past. So the partners rode out on their hopeful mission, chatting in high spirits as they swung along, feeling that a new day of security was breaking over the valley where earnest men and women had staked their lives and fortunes in a new, unfriendly land.

"Ever I meet Myrta Dolson I'll have to buy her a sack of peanuts to square myself," Taterleg chuckled. "I don't know how she's goin' to take that joke about you chasin' me off of the place with a gun."

"She'll know you're not as simple as you look, anyhow," Brady grinningly assured him.

"If I wasn't any simpler than I look I'd be in Congress, with all the ambition I've got," Taterleg said. "Myrta told them cowhands when they wanted to shake me down for my money that I was a simple-minded man. She kep' on rubbin' it in like she knew I was playin' possum and wanted to fetch me down a peg."

"Do you suppose she knew you were shamming, Jerry?"

"I've been wonderin'. She's smart enough. But maybe she was sorry for me on account of that girl I was tellin' you about—the one that wrote me a letter tellin' me she was married. They read it, every blame one of 'em. Anyhow, Myrta's heart's in the right place, even if she is mixed up with a bunch of thieves. She done me a friendly favor, and I'll return the compliment, if it ever comes my way."

They rode on, each with his own thoughts, after that outburst of generosity from Taterleg. They were in sight of town, the sun was dipping behind the hills, when Taterleg spoke:

"Well, here we are. What do you reckon that sheriff man's goin' to say when he lays his eyes on that paper?"

"We'll soon find out," Brady replied.

CHAPTER XIV.

SMOKE.

TWO dejected homesteaders set out from Buffalo at dawn. There was not fire enough in the hearts of both of them to warm a pan of mush. What the sheriff said when they

laid their cards on the table before him was bad enough; the way he said it, and his demeanor while expressing himself, was what put the crimp in Taterleg and his friend.

After all, he was a cowman sheriff. When it came to the showdown he was afraid to risk the enmity of his patrons by acting on the evidence submitted by a little bow-legged cook who had turned nester, and gone out detecting on his own account.

He had known Beal Twitchell twenty years; it would take more than a piece of paper with writing on it, that anybody could have done, to convince him that the old man was crooked; and it would require something just as strong to throw a shadow of suspicion on Colonel Twitchell's son.

It was dangerous business bringing such a charge against a respected citizen; if they wanted to place their so-called evidence before the grand jury, that would be the only way he knew to obtain official consideration of it. The grand jury would meet in October. And that would be about all the time he had to waste on them.

The partners had discussed the collapse of their hopes fully during the night in Buffalo. This morning they rode in chastened silence, well aware that they had done nothing more than complicate affairs for everybody in the valley, themselves in particular. The sheriff would pass the news along to Twitchell. If guilty, he would be eager to stop the spread of dangerous charges; if innocent, no man could blame him for striking hard in defense of his honor.

"We both ought to have known better than to waste all this time on the sheriff," Brady said at last. "But we'll go ahead with the plan we laid out last night, shoot across the river and see if we can find some cowmen there who've got sense enough to know hair on a dog when they see it."

"Well, I don't know," said Taterleg, dejectedly. "I ain't got much hope."

"We've got to hit it up and move fast in this business from now on. Wes Twitchell won't let any grass grow between the hoofs of that herd with you roamin' around knowin' what you know. He's on his way by now, well on his way. I doubt whether anybody could head him off before he gets to the Hole now, for he must know that country better than anybody on the range. He'll split his herd up in little bunches, hide in cañons by day and drive at night. But if we can get something started to-day, there's still a chance they'll catch him with the evidence. Figurin' always, of course, that Wes, Powers and Wallace haven't jumped the range and left the hired hands holdin' the sack."

"They might 'a' done that," Taterleg said, "and agin they might not. They might figger on nobody takin' my word, the way it's turned out. Wes was layin' out big things for this drive."

THAT brief discussion appeared to exhaust the possibilities. It was about sunrise; they were within ten miles of home. As they mounted the crest of a gentle hill up which they had allowed their horses to walk, Brady pulled up short.

"Look!" he said, pointing to three dark plumes rising high against the distant horizon. "There's Wes Twitchell's smoke!"

"That's *hay* smoke!" Taterleg declared, with premonition of personal loss.

"If it's only hay!" Brady returned, in fervent, low-breathed speech.

They gave their horses the rowels and bent to the race. They had no breath for words, no thought of what might happen to their horses at the killing pace they were driving them. They rode with eyes fixed on that point to the southwest where their lane ran down to the cottonwood trees and the hayricks stood in the mown meadows. Their thighs clamped their horses' sides as if they would lift and carry them along on the wings of their desires.

After some miles of this headlong galloping they swooped up a hill which gave them a vista of the valley. Here they paused with mutual accord.

"I'll take two of their damn' skelps for every ton of our hay they burn!" Taterleg vowed.

"If it's nothing but hay!" said Brady again, breathing the words on a groan.

Many fires were burning in haystacks and houses when the partners rode down into the valley and straightened out on the last stretch for home. Three miles or more lay between them and their own fields, but they could see that the raiders had not advanced that far. They had started at the eastern end of the settlement, nine or ten miles away from Brady's house, where the valley was broader and most thickly populated. From the look of it, the cattlemen were making a clean sweep of everything inflammable.

Some of the near neighbors had brought their women and children to Brady's house, it being the last the raiders would reach in their present order of approach. The house was a solid one, situated in favorable surroundings for defense. This move had been agreed upon in the often-discussed plans for defense, which many people had begun to believe, in these lately quiet days, they never would be called upon to make.

These refugees were in a state of panicky apprehension, fearing that everybody in the settlement would be killed, as the cattlemen had threatened so long. The men seemed stunned in the face of this disaster, although they were just making up a party to return and attempt a defense of their property when Brady and Taterleg rode down the lane.

BRADY'S absence had added to the despair and panic of these neighbors who had brought their women and children to the protection of his closely joined log walls. None of them knew of his trip to Buffalo; some of them were so badly shaken as to accuse him of desertion in the advance of the terrible scourge which had struck them with the fiery breath of doom. When they saw him coming they raised a yell of relief, as if he had brought force with him to insure their salvation.

More fugitives were coming, thronging the road leading to Brady's lane: men and women riding barebacked horses, children in their arms, some with their most precious possessions hastily thrown into sacks across the withers of their mounts; some in wagons driven by wild-eyed boys who stood to lash the galloping teams, their mothers and younger members of the family cowering in momentary expectation of death.

Many men had remained behind to drive their livestock to hiding among the willow thickets along the river, or to make preparations for standing in heroic defense of their homes. A few were at Brady's house when he flung himself from the saddle before the door.

Taterleg hastened to change the saddles to fresh horses, while Brady attempted to organize the small force at hand. All looked to him as leader on account of his past negotiations with the cowmen, and his recent effort to organize the settlers into a defensive body. Brady detailed five elderly men to stand by the women and children collected there, leaving it to them to arm the boys and such women as could handle guns.

With Taterleg and the other able-bodied men present, Brady rode out to increase his force and gather arms. As the little party advanced down the valley toward the scene of fire, eviction, and no knowing what other crimes under the shadow of that rolling smoke, men rode out and joined them, armed with every sort of weapon from old Mexican War carbines to the latest pattern of magazine rifles.

Other settlers who had followed their cattle into the brush, and were not ardent in their desire to emerge and participate in battle with the dreaded enemy, were summoned to duty, willy-nilly. Not a man of them, skulkers as some of them were, escaped his part in the community responsibility that day.

To give them the credit due, nearly all the settlers rushed into the fray with a feeling of exultant confidence and desperate relief. Living in the insecurity of constant menace was worse than actual fighting when the test for it arrived. Within half an hour of his start, Brady rode at the head of a band of twenty-four men and rawknuckled youths.

Refugees came trailing along the road with reports of the great number of raiders, and the merciless thoroughness with which they were sweeping the valley clean. This little party of terrified women and children, and lean men who panted like hounds as they footed it along the dusty road, reported that one man had been killed. They had seen him shot down with gun in his hands; they themselves had cut for the river, finally striking across fields into the road. They said an old bedridden woman had been burned in her house; the raiders, misunderstanding or disbelieving or not caring, had driven her son back when he attempted to rescue her.

THE men in this party handed to the women and children the dearly prized things which they had snatched as they left their homes; this one a clock, that one a cigar box containing no knowing what souvenirs of happier and more prosperous days. Then the men asked eagerly for guns, and turned back to fight. In this way Brady's force was recruited until it numbered thirty-one when they first came in sight of the raiders.

Contemptuous of the nesters, of whom they expected nothing but trembling submission, the raiding cattlemen had scattered in bands among the surrounding farms. In this way they were spread over considerable territory, much to their disadvantage and peril, as events were to prove.

The cowmen were carrying out a program of complete evacuation of the contested territory. Such householders as had not fled on their approach were compelled to hitch up their teams, throw a few possessions into their wagons, take their families and drive off, with instructions to keep moving until they were out of the country.

The cowmen were so intent on making a clean sweep of everything that they were not aware of the armed party riding against them. This was partly due to Brady's caution in taking

to the cover of willows and scrub cottonwoods along the river, but even more to the contempt in which these shooting men of the range held nesters and sheepmen, who never had been known to fight back.

This stealthy advance of the defending force was further befriended by the very misfortune they were galloping to avenge. A dense cloud of smoke was rolling from stacks and sheds behind the house they were approaching; the roar of flames muffled the sound of their hoofs.

The homestead under attack bordered the river, the house standing about a quarter of a mile from the stream. It was a low, substantial structure of logs, with a shingle roof. A fringe of cottonwoods stood along the river here, a thick screen of tall red willows nearer the water's edge. Here, c o m p l e t e l y hidden by this growth, Brady formed his little force for the charge.

CHAPTER XV.

BLOOD.

THE stubborn defense of the man barricaded inside his farmhouse had exasperated the cattlemen. They were just backing a load of burning hay against the front door when Brady's charge broke from the willows. The incendiaries were so engrossed with keeping out of the farmer's range as he pegged at them from his windows, that they were not aware of this battering ram of retribution until it was almost upon them.

Brady had ranged sixteen men, each armed with a repeating rifle and well practiced in its use, in his front line. The smoke from the burning haystacks, and a long rick of unthreshed oats, made such an effective screen that Brady and his men were within three hundred yards of the house before they were discovered.

A yell of alarm from a cowboy drew his comrades from their business in front of the house to face this incredible opposition, which was doubly disconcerting because it was entirely unexpected and moved with such inexorable intention and orderly form. At the yell a dozen or more horsemen came tearing around the house, pulling up sharply when they saw what was coming.

Brady halted his company and set the example by throwing a shot at the cowhands which emptied a saddle. The raiding cowmen were armed principally with pistols, there being not more than three rifles in that band, and the farmers had halted beyond accurate shooting of the best gun-slinger on the range. It was so much more than the cowmen had expected that they took heed of the instant urge to save their hides.

Three horses with empty saddles ran with them as they galloped out of that ravaged farmstead, and one man rode with his shoulders hunched sickly, as he clung to his saddle-horn. They were gone like a whirlwind, riding hard to join forces with the nearest band, which was engaged in sacking a poor little plank shanty about a quarter of a mile away.

The farmers rushed in and pulled the burning load of hay away from the house, and put out the fire that had started in the roof. The homesteader, a blood-splotched bandage around his arm, came out with rifle in hand to welcome them, followed by his wife and three small children.

"I said if we had to go we'd all go together," the woman recited, her

voice pitched in the high tremolo of heroic frenzy.

The homesteader said nothing; just stood looking around at the devastation that had been worked against his property. Several of his cattle had been killed in the feed-lot near his stacks; his long rick of oats, winter provender for his stock, was sinking away under a mass of roaring, smoke-green flame.

A WOUNDED cowboy was on his hands and knees, coughing blood, staggering like a hog that had been stuck to the heart. The homesteader raised his rifle with a jerk, maddened by the sight of his loss, insensible of the unmanly thing he was about to do before his children's eyes. His wife struck the rifle as he pulled the trigger, sending the bullet high over the wounded man.

"He's done all the harm he'll ever do!" she said, in that same high, strident pitch of excitement, which seemed in itself a wildly exultant cry. "Let him alone—he's done all the harm he'll ever do!"

"Yes, damn him!" her husband agreed.

The wounded man rose to his feet suddenly, ran a few steps, and pitched forward on his face. Taterleg was near him; he was looking the fellow squarely in the face when he rose, arms lifted like a ballet dancer. He was a young man, with the simple cowboy features of his kind; he had come there to burn without compunction, to murder without pity, and to spread ruin and disaster in the lives of people who never had wronged him by so much as a word, merely on the say-so of his cattle-owning boss that these were friends of the rustlers.

But there was such a pitiful wild yearning for life in his eyes as he sprang up in the very pangs of death, that Taterleg was moved profoundly.

Taterleg led the work of picking up the wreckage of that swift encounter. They ranged the three dead men side by side, covering their faces with their hats to wait the coroner. Somebody said, considering those kids, it would be the humane thing if they would throw the bodies into the burning stacks. Taterleg said no; they were soldiers, not murderers. Their business was to save the evidence, not destroy it. He got a blanket from the woman and laid rocks around the edges to keep the wind from lifting it.

It was sickening business, Taterleg thought; gloomy, saddening business, for a fact. And there would be more of it—this was nothing but the start. Those cowmen had cut a streak away from there, but that proved nothing; they were not the running kind. Let them collect their forces and something would pop. Then there would be more dead men to lay in rows; dead men in plenty on both sides. And dead men were not the kind of men the women and children of that community needed.

It ought to be stopped before it went any farther. He turned from the stone-bordered blanket and mounted his horse, seeing nothing more to be done around there. From the vantage of his saddle he could see the cowmen gathering at the plank shanty. They were riding around in great excitement, hot as a nest of disturbed bumble bees. There were a lot of them, twenty-five or thirty at least. And down the valley another bunch of them came riding in hot leather to join forces and come in for the finish.

That would be a hard and heavy finish for the women and children of

the valley, and for many a cow ranch back there among the hills. It ought to be stopped. Taterleg almost shouted the words aloud.

It was a senseless piece of business, a plumb foolish piece of business. If those misled cowmen could be shown how they were being played for a bunch of suckers by Wes Twitchell, and maybe by the old man himself, raising a smoke so Wes could strip them of every head of cattle he could gather for his swift get-away, they might come to their senses.

If somebody would make it plain to them that their fighting energy was needed that day in another direction, and lay proof before them that these nesters were innocent, slandered men, they surely would see reason.

IT would be a dangerous mission for the man who tried to convince them that Wes Twitchell had duped them into this monstrous outrage. The cattlemen would be savage over the loss they had stood, eager to avenge their fallen comrades and clear their own record of having been forced to run from a band of grangers. But it ought to be tried, and Taterleg was about the size of man to make the attempt.

Brady and the others were gathered around the homesteader; what the next move on their side was going to be he did not know. But Taterleg thought if he was general of that outfit he'd take that baled hay which had been saved from the cowmen, make breastworks of it, and wait for the cowmen to come.

If it were man to man in the open, gunning that way, one cowman would be as good as three or four nesters.

While the nesters were making themselves bullet-proof with the baled hay, Taterleg could ride out, signal the cowmen, and lay his cards before them. Something would have to be done, and done flip out of the pan. The cowmen were obviously getting ready.

Brady was looking at them now, and he was sizing up those grangers slouching around on their horses, feeling altogether too certain of themselves on account of their first victory. Brady rode over and joined his partner, who was sitting his horse close by the cut panels of wire fence through which the cowmen had come and gone. A neighbor named Bennett came with him; they were looking pretty serious and concerned.

"How many of them do you make out over there, Jerry?" Brady inquired.

"Purty clost to fifty," Taterleg replied, his eyes steadily on the shifting horsemen, who were plainly getting ready for a charge.

"I don't believe these boys will stand the gaff if they come," Brady said, his voice dropped low.

Taterleg didn't hang fire on expressing his opinion of the situation. He sketched his plan for using the baled hay, making a curving barrier in front of the house, from corner to corner, insuring their safety from the rear. They could make their position safe in ten minutes or less if everybody would grab a root and growl. The others pressed up as he talked; they nodded approval of the plan, which Brady pronounced sound.

Brady detailed a body of riflemen to stand guard while the others worked, sending the horses behind the house with some youngsters to tie them to the corral fence so they could not desert under fire. While the remainder of the force worked with the baled hay, Taterleg laid his plan for a truce with the cowmen before Brady

and Bennett, who was one of the detail on guard.

It sounded all right, Brady admitted, and it would doubtless receive consideration at the hands of reasonable men. But these cowmen were neither sensible nor reasonable.

"They'd hang you higher than Haman ever hung bacon," growled Bennett.

"Well, I guess every man's got one hangin' comin' to him," Taterleg said. "The quicker the sooner, maybe, if not before. If I wait till them fellers come buzzin' over here, it 'll be Katybar-the-door for us all."

WITHOUT any further argument in the matter, Taterleg unstrapped his guns, handed them to Brady, and rode through the cut panel of the line fence. He headed across the mown hayfield toward the ruins of the little house where the raiders were organizing.

As he advanced he raised his hand in the sign of peace, and the whole body of cowmen and their retainers faced their horses around to see what this emissary from the enemy was coming to propose.

Three elderly men, leaders of the expedition, or hastily appointed for the parley, rode out to meet Taterleg. Instead of halting for them to meet him approximately halfway between the lines, Taterleg continued forward, right hand still lifted in that Indian peace sign which no range man would fail to understand.

Taterleg wanted to get as near the main body as possible before he began to talk, for what he had to say might not be convincing to three men. It all depended on whether the outriders were such close friends of Beal Twitchell that they would feel like shooting him on the spot for his serious charge against that leader of the cattle world.

A few rods before meeting him, and not more than a hundred yards from their main force, the three cowmen pulled up abruptly. Taterleg made a grave salutation with his upraised right hand, at once a greeting and an expression of approval.

"Gentlemen, I'm not here to lay down any terms or ask any favors," Taterleg opened the parley. "I'm here to lay some facts and evidence before you, and leave it to you as honorable men to act on them *as* honorable men. Before I say more, I want to respectfully inquire if Colonel Beal Twitchell is present?"

The cowmen regarded him with disfavor, and heard his somewhat stilted and studied preamble with lowering brows.

"You can say your say to us; Colonel Twitchell ain't here," the eldest and grimmest of the three cowmen replied.

"No offense intended, gentlemen," Taterleg assured them, in what he believed to be the placative words of diplomacy. "I didn't expect to meet Colonel Twitchell here to-day. Would you mind tellin' me if his boy Wes is ridin' with your outfit?"

"If you've come here to say anything to us, nester, spit it out," the cowman returned.

"Then I'll answer my own question," Taterleg said, calm and unmoved by the cowman's threatening attitude. "Wes Twitchell ain't here. You've been wonderin' why, seein' it was him that organized this raid. Well, gentlemen, that's what I'm here to tell you. Gentlemen, I'm a stranger in this country, I ain't been here long enough for many people to know me, but I've

seen enough before to-day to convince me you cowmen have got these nesters sized up wrong. They're not the men that's been rustlin' your cattle; I've—"

"Oh, hell!" said one of the trio, a man just a degree younger than the veteran who had done the talking for them up to that point, and a degree more impatient. "We didn't come here to listen to a damn fool!"

THE chairman of the committee imposed silence on this intolerant member.

"What was you startin' to say about Wes Twitchell, nester?" he inquired.

"I was startin' to tell you, gentlemen, that I went out alone on my own hook and responsibility a few days ago to see if I couldn't get a line on who was doin' the rustlin' on this range. It was the first time in my life I ever played detective, and I'm here to promise you, gentlemen, it 'll be the last."

Taterleg declared this vehemently, as a man of honor whose character had been smirched by a necessary but ignoble duty, and was determined to stand clean before these representatives of a business which he once had believed to be the most noble in the world.

"And from what I found out, gentlemen, and what I'm able to prove, you cowmen are here makin' a smoke for Wes Twitchell to drive off your cows to Jackson's Hole, sell 'em, stick the money in his jeans, and skip the country."

"Oh, hell!" said the intolerant cowman, whose vocabulary was not as deep as his emotions.

The leader of the party raised his hand in severe gesture of interdiction.

"You're sayin' something that's goin' to turn out mighty serious for you if you can't prove it, nester," this grave, hard-featured cowman said.

"I realize exactly where I stand, gentlemen," Taterleg assured them. "I'm here to try to save the lives of men on both sides of this damn' fool fightin'."

He told them his discoveries in what was, for Taterleg, few words and straight to the bone. To cap it all, he produced the bill of sale written on Beal Twitchell's paper, signed by Beal Twitchell's name. The straight story of his adventure into the rustlers' camp, his capture of Wallace, the pursuit and rescue; and above everything, that written paper with blank spaces in it for the insertion of the number and description of brands, set those cowmen thinking, and thinking hard.

"Why didn't you tell somebody before this what you say you found out?" the old cowman inquired sternly. "If this is even half true, you could 'a' saved a lot of trouble by tellin' some of us cowmen."

Taterleg told of the efforts of himself and Brady to interest the sheriff, to whom they had ridden red-hot with the news; his contemptuous reception of it, and their return not more than two hours ago.

"We was aimin' to head over the river as soon as we could change horses and look up the Diamond 4 and the Triangle S," Taterleg explained. "But you know why we didn't go."

"The Triangle S is my brand," the old cowman said. "What did you want to tell me?"

"I wanted to tell you three head of your cows was in the bunch I helped that cowhand named Ches drive up to the back range. There was two head of the Diamond 4, and two of a brand I couldn't read—like this."

Taterleg drew a sign in the palm of his hand which might have been an Arabic character or a shorthand symbol.

"The Grapevine Twist; old man Miller's brand," the cowman said.

They drew apart from Taterleg a little way, where they leaned to bring their heads together, discussing the tale of this queer-looking nester.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRUCE.

BEAL TWITCHELL had plenty of friends in that crowd; Taterleg could feel their hostility as he finished stating his case, even before their outbursts of challenge, denial, and defense. He knew his neck was not worth a soda cracker if the majority should decide against him and throw his charges aside as unworthy of their consideration.

But there was something in his sincerity, together with the paper bearing Beal Twitchell's name, that won consideration from the cooler heads which dominated the raiding party. They asked if he was willing to accompany a detail to the range and identify the men whom he accused in case they could be overtaken. Taterleg assured them he was itching to go. His only condition was that the raiders withdraw and leave the nesters in peace until the truth or falsity of his charges could be proved.

It was so agreed. The three who had come out to meet him rode back toward the nesters' position with Taterleg, Brady and others advancing to the parley when they approached. Brady was strongly against what he declared to be Taterleg's suicidal course. What he had to say he said plainly to the cowmen's faces, and that was nothing to make them blush with modesty nor tingle with pride.

There was no honor in them, Brady declared; failing to catch Wes Twitchell and the other rustlers, with their twenty-four hours' start, the cowmen would hang Taterleg to the first tree big enough to bear his weight. Beal Twitchell's bare and unsupported word would be enough to clear him in the cowmen's court.

Anyway, Brady added bitterly, this war was not based on the cowmen's belief that the nesters were rustling cattle. That was only a blind. The cowmen wanted the range restored as it originally was; it was a war against fences, not cattle thieves.

The cowmen listened to this plain talk without attempting to deny Brady's hard charges. Taterleg admired his partner's courage; but he had an ingenuous faith in the honor of cowmen which held him firm to his purpose. He had passed his word to them, he said; if they hung him after he had carried out his part of the agreement in good faith, then the dishonor would be theirs.

"And a hell of a lot of good that 'd do you!" Brady said.

But Taterleg was not to be shaken. He had passed his word. Seeing that he was determined to carry the foolish undertaking through, Brady took Taterleg's weapons from his saddlehorn and handed them across.

"You're neither a prisoner nor an inferior," he said. "Buckle on your guns."

"I'll take my own old iron," Taterleg remarked, girdling himself with the belt which had twinkled his initials in silver tacks from the Arkansas to the Little Missouri.

"Here's another little chunk of evi-

dence," he added, passing the other belt and gun to the old cowman of the Triangle S. "This is the gun I took off that feller they called Wallace, but I don't know whether that's his first name or his last."

The cowman took the gun and looked at it curiously as if he had been given something rare in his experience to examine.

"It might be any damn' gun," put in the skeptical member of the party.

THE ardor of the raiders had cooled considerably by the time Taterleg and the three cowmen returned from arranging truce with the nesters. Many of them were nothing more than cowhands, who had been looking forward to this invasion of the valley as a sort of gay and agreeable lark, ridding their range of interlopers who had no business there. The unexpected resistance of the nesters had been a shocking surprise to them. For another thing, this warfare against women and children did not sit very well with them, once they had witnessed the cruelty of it. It outraged their sense of decency; and their notions of the big bosses' rights began to undergo a change.

By now they had cooled down to where they desired nothing so much as to sneak off to the range, away from the accusing eyes of those evicted women whose poor little houses they had destroyed. They were muttering to each other that they were cowhands, anyhow; not killers hired to burn houses and drive women and children shelterless and terrified abroad into a barren land.

Young fellows, these cowhands were, for the greater part, for somehow theirs was a calling in which men never seemed to grow very old. Cowpunchers, somehow, wore out before many gray hairs came to humiliate them. Being young, their sympathies were near the skin, and they now began to ride off, making no explanation of their desertion to anybody.

Some of them stopped when they overtook the refugees who were making their sad way toward Buffalo, reined in and spoke to them with shamefaced kindness. The war was over, they said; go back home. More than one cowhand fished out his little roll, saved in anticipation of a glorious holiday, and pressed it into the hand of a tearful woman, or dropped it surreptitiously, with desire to make amends as far as lay within his power, into the wagon-bed where terrified children crouched among the poor belongings snatched from homes which now lay in ashes.

As he rode with a body of nine cowmen who were heading for Beal Twitchell's house, Taterleg saw these simple fellows doing what they could to relieve the distress which they had caused through their misguided loyalty. His heart distended at the sight; he lifted himself in his stirrups as if to flap his wings and crow. He knew the breed that he had bunked with from the Arkansas to the Bad Lands. Wild devils, generous devils, softhearted devils, like himself. He sure knew the breed.

Ten or twelve cowmen had started for the back range to pick up the trail of the wagon of which Taterleg had told them, and to ride hard for Horsethief Cañon, to see if there were any stolen cattle assembled there. Taterleg knew that his own party was going to confront Beal Twitchell. He wondered how that old scoundrel would take it when they flashed that false bill of sale before his eyes.

The cattle owners and their henchmen did not admit Taterleg to terms of equality as they rode, although they asked him many questions about his experiences in the rustlers' camp. It seemed incredible to some of them, at least, that a man who never had borne any more important part in the cattle world than camp cook could have subdued two able-bodied rustlers, stripped one of his possessions, and carried the other off prisoner.

That appeared to them the weak point in his story, Taterleg perceived. It was beyond them to conceive how a man who never had thrown a rope nor applied a branding-iron in his life could put through a cowmanly job like that.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COLONEL AT BAY.

TWITCHELL came to the porch to receive the visitors, still a little lame, but better than when Taterleg had seen him last. He heard the Triangle S man, whose name was Winslow, recite the charges which Taterleg had brought against his son, listening silently, with a dumb look of amazement. He stared from man to man as if to convince himself that it was not all an illusion.

"Why, gentlemen!" he said, staring at them as if they had inflicted some barbarous, unbelievable cruelty on him. "Why, gentlemen!"

Then he came out of the daze into which this charge, accusing him of the deepest disgrace that could come to a cowman, seemed to have plunged him. He turned on Taterleg as if he would vindicate his honor at a blow.

"It's incredible to me, gentlemen, that you'd come here with even a suspicion in your minds on no better authority than the word of a prowlin' nester. This dirty varmint hired out to me as my cook, spyin' for that thievin' set of nesters in the valley. I kicked him out of my house. Gentlemen, it hurts me to have my neighbors comin' to my door lookin' black in the face and makin' these disgraceful charges ag'in' my son with no more back of them than the word of a slinkin' nester."

The Triangle S man, whose name was Winslow, did not attempt to answer this denunciation. He pulled out his wallet and produced the bill of sale which bore Beal Twitchell's name.

"This man says he took this paper off of a person by the name of Powers; Mitch Powers, I take him to be, from this feller's description. Is that your hand at the bottom of it?"

Twitchell looked at the paper with a dumfounded expression which, if not a genuine reflection of his true emotions, was excellently simulated.

"By thunder! It looks like it! It looks like it!" he said. He looked at Winslow squarely, then shifted his stern gaze to man after man in the group. "But I swear to you, gentlemen, I've never set eyes on this paper before."

"Somebody w r o t e it," Taterleg said. "It's your paper, ain't it?"

"It looks to be, it looks to be. But anybody could get at my paper, anybody that comes and goes here. The doors ain't never locked—anybody can come and go as free as the wind. My name's signed to enough paper, Heaven knows, for anybody to copy it that wanted to. I swear to you I never signed it to this one, gentlemen."

"Somebody wrote it," Winslow iterated with the insistence of a man unconvinced.

"Ask the plunderin' nester you got it from to explain it," Twitchell proposed wrathfully. "He was in my house long enough to plunder his pockets full of my paper. This was framed up between him and that cow-stealin' Brady, and I tell you, gentlemen, a rope around this feller's neck 'll fetch the truth out of him in a hurry!"

TWITCHELL was standing on the edge of the porch, which was about stirrup-high, his heavy stick leaning against the spindling turned pillar at his side. He shook the paper at Taterleg as he denounced him.

"Yes, I could 'a' robbed you," Taterleg admitted. "I could 'a' robbed you blind. Only I ain't built that way, and you know it as well as you know your own brand."

The old cowman's wrath turned from Taterleg to his neighbors, who were ranged up in front of him, not any too favorably impressed by his bluster.

"Comin' here layin' this scan'alous charge ag'in' my boy!" he fumed. "I ort to take my gun and run the whole damned pack of you off of the place!"

He fumbled in his vest pocket with nervous fingers as he glared at them, fury in his old boar's eyes. Before any of them, even Taterleg, had read his intention, he struck a match against the post and set fire to the bill of sale. Winslow leaned and snatched at the blazing paper with sharp exclamation of protest. Twitchell twisted back out of reach and threw it fairly on the threshold of his door. In a breath that piece of evidence, good or worthless as it may have been, was gone.

"Neighbors of mine!" said the old cowman, puffing and passionate, his big brows pulled down until they bunched owlishly together over his vindictive eyes. "Some of you on this range with me thirty years! I ort to grab my gun and burn holes in the lot of you."

"That's no talk, Twitchell," Winslow reproved him. "You had no right to burn that paper; that ain't goin' to help your boy any. And if you're so keen to throw your gun, why wasn't you with us throwin' it to-day?"

"I'll burn all the damn forged paper I can lay my hands on!" Twitchell retorted.

"Neither you nor your boy was with us to-day," Winslow charged sternly. "How do you explain that, Twitchell?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, Winslow."

"Are you tellin' us you don't know what's been goin' on along the river this morning?" Winslow challenged him. "There's been fightin' goin' on there to-day, Twitchell. The nesters killed three of our men and shot another one so bad he ain't hardly got a chance. You mean to tell us you don't know anything about it?"

"I swear to you, gentlemen, it's all news to me."

"Well, we was called out in your name, as president of this association. We knew you was laid up, but we took it to be official. But where was your boy?"

"Who called you out?" Twitchell inquired, the hot blood sinking out of his face.

"Your boy, Wes. We took it to be official. This man says he overheard Mitch Powers and a man named Wallace talkin' about it in the rustlers' camp. They spoke of a man they called Ace High callin' out the cattlemen for the purpose of makin' a smoke for him to get away under. This man says they had ninety-odd head of stolen cattle

rounded up at Horsethief Cañon ready to drive to Jackson's Hole."

"You're goin' on damn poor evidence, gentlemen," Twitchell said.

"THIS man says they had a scheme laid to strip the range of every head of cattle they could lay hands on," Winslow went on, ignoring the interruption. "I'm givin' it to you straight, Twitchell, and I'm tellin' you we believe there's something in it. If this man's a liar he's the completest liar I ever run acrost. He's volunteered to come along with us and identify the gang if we can round them up. For my part, I believe he's tellin' the truth. What have you got to say?"

Taterleg was exulting over the way the old man had cut the ground from under his own heels by burning that paper. An honest man would not have done that. Taterleg was sure he had the old scoundrel hauled up short with his tail across the chopping-block now.

"I'll say this, gentlemen: I've lost more cattle the past two years by these thievin' operations than the rest of you put together. Is it reasonable to suppose my son's been robbin' me, or that I've been robbin' myself?"

"There's a lot to be explained," Winslow told him.

"It looks that way," Twitchell returned, glaring meaningly at Taterleg.

Taterleg met the look with composure.

"You poor old four-flusher," he thought, "we're due to see how far your bluff's goin' to take you when you run up agin your own cowman kind."

The broncho-eyed kids were crowding against the window, and behind them Taterleg saw their mother come now and then, stand a little while, straining to hear what was going on. She would stand a few moments, her face white and anxious, then walk back into the house.

"Where's Wes?" Winslow inquired, his manner growing harder and more challenging with every word.

"It's my belief he's been detained on the range by some unforeseen happenin'," Twitchell replied. "I'm not in the best kind of shape for ridin', but I'll go with you and stay with you till we find him, and hear the truth from his own tongue that'll squelch this prowlin' nester's lies."

"We expect you to do no less," Winslow said.

"My son ain't a thief, gentlemen," Twitchell declared passionately, turning to face them after starting to enter the house. "It mortifies me to the heart to have you come here and lay such a charge at my door, but, gentlemen, if he was to turn out a thief, I'd help you hang him—I'd help you hang him as quick as I would that prowlin' nester!"

There was a commotion in the house at Colonel Twitchell's entry; the sound of hurrying feet, of questions and protestations, Mrs. Twitchell's voice rising against her husband's not too gentle commands to hold her peace. It was too delicate a question to discuss with women and children, Taterleg realized; he was sorry for that old cow colonel's wife, although she deserved little sympathy.

IT was all coming home to Beal Twitchell now with a rush, that hiring of Texas shooters to skulk in the brush and murder innocent kids and harmless sheepmen, and stalk a more or less honest bow-legged camp cook on the road at night. Let them get white around the gills and do a little tear-slopping on their own

broncho-eyed Wes's account now. A man's sins would break out on him like the seven-year itch, said Taterleg, let him hide them as he might.

Twitchell was shouting for the boy to go and saddle a horse, and slamming around as if he had developed a sudden suspicion and dislike of the whole brood. Mrs. Twitchell took advantage of his preparations to slip out and question her neighbors on the cause of this flurry.

"Mr. Winslow, what is the meaning of all this?" she appealed, her voice dry and husky in her throat, her big eyes showing white like those of a calf under the hot iron. "I can't get a word out of Colonel Twitchell! What does all this excitement mean?"

"We're goin' to investigate some trouble back on the range, ma'am," Winslow told her.

"I heard talk about rustlers; you mentioned my son's name. Has he been hurt, Mr. Winslow?"

Winslow shook his head slowly, his face somber, his mouth clamped sternly.

"I can't tell you anything, ma'am," he replied at length.

"Something has happened to him!" she said. "It's cruel to keep it from me, you've got no right to keep it from me!" She turned to Taterleg, twenty years gone out of her face, he thought. She stretched her hand to him in distracted supplication. "Mr. Wilson, tell me what it is—tell me, Mr. Wilson!"

"Ma'am?" said Taterleg, starting at the unexpected appeal, the sudden recognition that he was an understanding human being by this woman who had snubbed him in the past. It jarred him like a punch in the gizzard.

"Mr. Wilson," she said, with slow insistence, pathetic pleading, "tell me what they've done to my boy!"

So you know my name, old lady, Taterleg ruminated, withdrawing into his shell. You can come down off of your high horse when you want to gimlet something out of a feller, can't you? Well, you're comin' to a dry spring with your little red bucket, old lady; you might as well trot along. While this ran through his mind Taterleg looked at her with stony aloofness.

"I'm not doin' the talkin' for this outfit, ma'am," he said, his voice much gentler than the bristling unfriendliness of his face.

Twitchell appeared before she could press her appeal, for which Taterleg was thankful. She didn't deserve consolation, but it wasn't in him to hold out against a woman. The old man had shucked off his white shirt—it had a bosom as big as a coffin lid, Taterleg thought—and with it whatever pretensions to gentility he affected.

In this blue woolen shirt with open collar, he was a rough and ready old cowman with cockle-burs in his tail. Even to Taterleg, who had no kindly feeling for him, he was an admirable figure, a concentration of all the rough majesty that went to make the cowman king.

Mrs. Twitchell turned to him the moment his foot struck the porch.

"Colonel Twitchell, what is this pressing business that calls you to the saddle, and you in no condition—"

"This is men's business," he told her curtly. "Go in the house and tend to your children. I'll take care of my own affairs without any woman's meddlin'."

SHE lingered, as if to oppose her will against this feudal domination. Colonel Twitchell pointed to the door with gesture of threatening command, as if directing the movements of a dog. Humiliated in the sight

of those who shared this mystery with her lord, she bowed her head and entered the house.

So a man carries himself toward those who love him and whom he loves, when a shadow, the taint of which he would spare them, reaches out from the sunlight of his triumphant past, threatening them with dishonor.

Twitchell got into his saddle from the porch, with what pains nobody but himself could know. The torture of his effort gave his face the gray tinge of senility, but he thrust his swollen foot into the stirrup and lifted his hand in sign that he was ready to go.

Taterleg looked back as they rode through the gate where he had deflected Twitchell's bullet from his friend's heart at almost this same hour on another afternoon. The boy was standing where he had let go his father's reins, looking after them with no telling what thoughts behind those broncho eyes; Mrs. Twitchell and the girls were at the door, the woman's anxious face seeming to plead after him for one assuring word.

It was cruel to leave her in the torture of groping conjecture, but the truth would not have consoled her any more than uncertainty. The old cowman's way was the wiser way, but it was hard on a woman; it was powerful hard on a woman, give it the easiest name that Taterleg's limited resources could supply.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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Fish That Build Homes

THE African lung-fish, found in the lakes and rivers of Africa, are the only known fish that build houses. The fish derives its name from the fact that it has both lungs and gills, which enable it to live out of the water a considerable length of time. Attaining a length of eighteen inches, the fish has two leg-shaped fins which enable it to navigate on land with considerable speed.

During the rainy season the fish dwells in the water like other fish. But just before the dry season, which lasts from August until December, the fish digs a hole about two feet deep in the mud. Entering this cocoon-shaped mud house, the fish leaves a small hole at the top through which to breathe, curls itself up and commences its hibernation, which lasts through the dry season. The intense heat of the sun bakes the mud cocoon hard as brick. During the torpid period the fish lives on its own fat, and when the rainy season fills the stream again, it emerges as thin and hungry as a bear.

The lung-fish is much favored by the natives as a food. At the beginning of the season of drought the natives hunt them in the dried-up lake and river beds, removing the fish, cocoons and all. When the fish are plentiful they are stored away for future use, serving as "canned" food. At times large piles of these mud-canned fish can be seen in native huts.

William P. Schramm.

"Too late, buddy, restaurant's closed," said Bill good-naturedly

No More Mush

Bill and Jim, drifters by profession, help out a budding Romeo—and drift into trouble

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

COMFORTABLY filled with beef stew, Bill and I were preparing to discard the empty tin can, extinguish the fire, and resume our tramp to Goshen, when a harassed-looking young fellow broke through the underbrush—attracted, I assumed, by the smoke from our open-air fireplace.

"Too late, buddy, the restaurant is closed," said Bill good-naturedly, as he tossed away the empty can.

"Who are you?" The young fellow snapped it out with the air of a person in the devil of a hurry.

Bill glanced at me in alarm. I knew what was in his mind. It had cost us ten dollars with costs once for starting a fire in the open at this season of the year—and history has a disagreeable way of repeating itself.

"Why? Are you taking a census?" Bill countered, stalling for time.

"You're just a pair of bums, aren't you?"

"Bums?" echoed Bill in pained surprise and outraged dignity. "We aren't bums. We're a pair of drifters, seeking adventure and romance on the—"

"Well, here's a gob of romance for you," interrupted the young fellow. "Somebody's got to help me, so I'm

going to take a chance on you. I saw the smoke, and—but I haven't got time for all that bunk. I'm in a hurry. You'll help a pal who's in trouble, won't you?"

His tone was so pleading, and he looked so worried, that Bill and I assured him that we'd hold a life-net if he wanted to jump.

The young fellow hesitated for a moment.

"Were you ever in love?" he demanded at last.

"Lots of times," replied Bill airily.

I nodded in confirmation. There was no necessity for Bill to hog the spotlight.

The young fellow sighed.

"Well, over there, there's a girl."

He waved in the general direction of a farmhouse which Bill and I remembered having passed earlier in the afternoon, though now it was out of sight because of the trees.

"There's girls in every other direction, too," Bill reminded him.

The young fellow seemed annoyed at the interruption.

"Over there, there's a girl," he repeated emphatically. "She and I were going to leave this afternoon for California. We planned to go into the movies. Her folks were going to be out of town to-day, and I was to call and get her. Everything was all set. When I got to the house, though, I found that the old man had a toothache or something, and had stayed at home."

"And he chased you off the premises with a shotgun, eh?" chuckled Bill.

THE young fellow appeared gratified at Bill's perspicacity.

"With a shotgun. You see, he doesn't want Alice to go into the movies, and he doesn't want her to marry me. Hot-tempered, determined old cuss he is."

"You don't expect us to go back and argue with him and his shotgun?" demanded Bill in alarm.

"Oh, no, nothing like that," reassured the young fellow.

"Then where do we come in?"

"Don't keep interrupting me!" he interposed testily. "I'm in the devil of a rush. Here's the idea: Before the old man got wise to what was happening, Alice gave her hand bag to me."

He pulled a small brown leather hand bag from under his coat. "Now I've got to go back and get Alice. We'll take the side road to Goshen. I can't take the bag with me because I don't want the old man to see it; he'd guess right away what was up. And furthermore, I may need both my hands. That's where you two come in. You take the bag to Goshen for me. I'll meet you at the restaurant on the corner of Main and Water Streets, and get it from you.

"Don't fail me, because our train leaves the station at three o'clock. I'm taking the dickens of a chance, picking up a pair of bums to—"

"We aren't bums," Bill interrupted him indignantly.

"Well, a pair of strangers, then," amended the young fellow. "But I'm up against it, and I've got to take a chance on somebody. If you fall down on me, I'll—I'll—"

His voice suddenly became steely. It does beat the Dutch what love 'll do to an otherwise sane person.

"Don't worry," reassured Bill. "We'll help you and Alice. You can depend on us. Me and my pal are on the level."

"Keep the bag under your coat," warned the young fellow. "It has her

initials on the side. Somebody might recognize it and tip the old man off. Don't fail me. Remember; half past two at the Main Street Restaurant, and if I'm not there you'll know that I've run into a snag and will have to wait for the next train. Stay until I come."

He thrust the leather hand bag at us and immediately disappeared into the brush.

"Holy mackerel!" sighed Bill. "Who ever would have thought that a pair of old drifters like us would be playing the rôles of props to hold up the piazza for *Romeo* and *Juliet?* Well, all the world loves a lover."

"All except the old man with the shotgun," I reminded him.

He tucked the little hand bag under his coat, and we pushed out to the road and headed toward Goshen.

"Love," pondered Bill, "is a wonderfully strange thing."

"Something like diphtheria or measles, but more apt to prove fatal," I agreed. I knew that Bill was thinking about the blond queen in Beary's Carnival, who had run off with the lion tamer just when Bill was trying to muster up courage to pop the question. Bill never got over that. He's like a breakfast saucer—hard on the outside, but full of mush inside.

TRAFFIC on the road to Goshen was light, but we took no chances. Every time we saw an auto coming we scooted into the brush. It may be fun to join in the chorus of "Love's Old Sweet Song," but there's a wide gulf between Cupid juggling an arrow and an irate father packing a double-bore shotgun.

Two cars we didn't see coming. One was a roadster with an out-of-the-State license, which shot past without slowing. The other came up from behind just as we had rounded a curve. At the wheel was an old fellow with a walrus mustache. Abreast of us he slowed up and leaned over.

"Hey, you two!" he called brusquely. Bill tried to hide the bulge in his coat. "Did you happen to see a young fellow on the road—dark hair, checkered cap, brown suit, and blue shirt?"

The description just fitted Alice's friend. Bill and I almost passed out, but Bill gave a demonstration of quick thinking.

"Sure we saw him," he declared. "He was hurrying away in the opposite direction from Goshen." That was the truth, too.

The old fellow swung his car round so quickly that two of the wheels didn't have a chance to touch the ground; and without even a "Thank you!" he sped off.

"Whew! That was a narrow squeak," muttered Bill. "I guess that is Alice's dad himself. It looks as though Alice has made her get-away all right, and dad is hot on the trail of the bridegroom-to-be."

We quickened our pace, and the town clock was just booming two as we swung down Goshen's Main Street and headed for the restaurant on the corner of Water Street.

We had thirty cents between us, but Bill contended that we should save twenty cents to buy some kind of a wedding present, so we merely ordered a pair of coffees.

"What time does the westbound train pull out?" Bill asked the counterman, as we leisurely sipped our coffee.

"I don't know, but I can find out for you," obliged the counterman. He called to somebody in the depths of the kitchen, "Hey, Tim, stick your head out and holler to Barney. Tell him a

couple of traveling men are here inquiring about the trains."

BILL and I tried not to appear too flattered as we heard the message being broadcast to somebody in the distance. It isn't often that we are mistaken for traveling men.

Just then, however, our attention was diverted to other matters, for the front door swung open and Alice's boy-friend appeared. He stood for an instant in the doorway glancing hurriedly up and down the street. Then, apparently reassured, he quickly slunk in. Relief flashed over his countenance as he recognized us.

"Where's the bag?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Is Alice with you?" queried Bill, as he slipped the hand bag from under his coat.

The young fellow ignored the question. His twitching fingers eagerly clutched the bag.

The front door had opened again, and the counterman was genially addressing a new arrival.

"Sorry to bother you, Barney, but these men here"—he was indicating Bill and me—"they wanted—"

Barney, the perambulating information bureau, proved to be a brass-buttoned, blue-coated officer.

Alice's boy-friend swung around abruptly and caught one glimpse of the uniform. His hand flashed to his hip pocket and withdrew clutching a deadly-looking automatic.

"Now, now!" chided Bill. "What would become of Alice if you did something foolish?" His hand whipped out and he struck the automatic to the floor.

The young fellow swung angrily on Bill. The policeman, though taken completely by surprise, rose nobly to the emergency and rushed forward. The young fellow lunged for the fallen automatic, but the policeman was a lap ahead and kicked it out of his reach.

There was a brief tussle, but it ended almost as abruptly as it had started—ended with the click of handcuffs on the young fellow's wrists.

"You've got me," he growled. "I surrender. The loot's in the bag there." He nodded toward the brown hand bag lying on the floor. Then he glared malignantly at us.

"So you're a pair of dirty dicks," he growled. "And I was gol-dinged fool enough to play right into your hands. But that old farmer was hot on my trail after he spotted me crawling out of the window with the family jewels, and I had to take a chance on somebody. I thought you fell for that fool elopement story, but you're a pair of—"

The rest was lost to us as the officer commanded him to shut up, and led him growling from the place.

"We—" I began as we slumped back to our places at the counter.

Bill glanced at me warningly.

"If you say one danged word about love or romance I'll fire this saucer at you," he declared.

"I was just going to remark that we might as well blow in the rest of our thirty cents on a couple of slabs of pie," I explained with dignity, "seeing as we don't have to buy no wed—"

"Pie for two," Bill interrupted curtly.

"Pie for two!" chanted the counterman.

"Pie for two!" came the echo from the kitchen.

"And no more mush!" I snickered to Bill.

THE END.

Bill Robinson dictated the epoch-making announcement about the Lewton Aircar

A Great Man's Shoes

With an invention to revolutionize air travel almost within his grasp, Bill Robinson dares a felon's cell as he battles the wolves of Wall Street

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Run, Dan, Run!" "The Mental Marvel," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM ROBINSON is twenty-seven when a bomb explosion kills his father and three partners, and plunges Bill into the unfamiliar workings of his father's financial empire, holding stocks of air and rail transportation companies, steel, coal, *et cetera*. Bill is convinced that his father was murdered by business rivals; and follows his attorney Reach's advice not to liquidate the company, but to disappoint the murderers by carrying on.

Convinced by the resignation and treachery of John Redding, his father's chief lieutenant, that he can trust no one in Wall Street, Bill brings a classmate, Professor Irving Smith of the Harvard School of Business Administration, to advise him on fundamentals; then searches for his father's hidden plans, a secret program for which he had assembled ten millions in cash.

Partly through Redding's carelessness, partly through the shrewdness of a stenographer, Jane Gregg, Bill learns that negotiations have been in progress, through Redding, with an inventor named Chester Lewton.

Robinson and Smith fly to Lewton's secret laboratory, on a Lake Michigan

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island, only to find it attacked by thugs under the direction of Redding and Sam Bates, president of a Robinson Company air line, but a man with a checkered past. Bates is an admirer of Margaret Eastingham, niece of Robinson's greatest rival in monopolizing transportation, Enoch Eastingham; but Smith vigorously defends the Eastinghams from complicity in this murderous business.

Lewton escapes in his Aircar—an egg-shaped vehicle that rises vertically and flies without wings. Bill and Smithie get back to civilization—to find that Eastingham and his allies have smashed the Robinson stocks, and that the company faces bankruptcy on the morrow. But Bill boldly draws out the seven millions in cash that remain—risking a felony charge for concealing assets—and hurries to Lewton's Connecticut home; offers him the check and a note for three millions more, and buys the Aircar, which will revolutionize air transport, since it can rise vertically from a housetop. To-morrow he faces bankruptcy with a hundred millions in liabilities against him. But now he, Smith, Jane Gregg, and Lewton inspect the Aircar.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LEWTON AIRCAR.

LEWTON presented the armed guard to them. "My friend and fellow worker, Stephen Hendricks. . . . This is William Robinson, who has purchased my invention; his secretary, Miss Gregg; and Professor Irving Smith."

"Pleased to meet you all," said Hendricks pleasantly. "Step in."

They entered a circular chamber about ten feet across, with wooden benches for seats set against the walls. Bill looked about him in astonishment.

"Where's the machinery?" he demanded. "How do you make the thing go?"

Lewton smiled and crossed the room, opened a door in the forward partition, and showed a chamber located in the small end of the egg. It contained a driver's seat, instrument board, and a cased-in engine of the Diesel type. There was also what looked like a battery of oxygen tanks, and a complicated coil under glass.

"I'm just as much at sea as I was before," said Robinson. "Try to explain to me, Lewton, in words of one syllable for the benefit of a simple-minded person like Professor Smith. I probably won't get it then, but he will."

Lewton laughed contentedly. He was a very happy man at the moment. "In the first place, the metal of which this plane is constructed is a composition which is totally unknown. It includes, among other things, iron and silver and mercury. I call it Lewtonite, and I don't suppose you will object to that name being applied to it."

"No. I christen thee Lewtonite," declared Robinson with a wave of his hand.

"Its special feature is that it can be magnetized by an electric current and it then possesses peculiar properties." He paused impressively.

"Elucidate," commanded Robinson.

"You are familiar of course with the law of gravitation."

"Newton and the apple. An airplane falling because it's heavier than air. Certainly."

"Very good, Lewtonite rejects gravitation. It falls away from the earth, not toward it."

"Heavens," exclaimed the pro-

fessor. "You mean it would fall into space?"

"Exactly. Unguided, it would seek that part of space where there is no influence exerted by heavenly bodies."

"But the thing isn't possible," protested Smith.

"Don't be silly," retorted Robinson. "You've seen it demonstrated."

"How did you ever find such a metal?" asked Jane Gregg, awed at the thought of "falling up," into space.

Lewton smiled. "I was shot down during the war. As the plane was falling, the idea of such an airship occurred to me. I have been seeking it ever since; and found it a year ago."

He rose and stepped to the curious machine under glass. "This is my generator; and this is my control. By partially magnetizing the Lewtonite shell I make the machine rise slowly and vertically. By withdrawing the current I permit it to sink to earth. Under proper guidance I can land upon a space no larger than the dimensions of the car and without the slightest shock."

"And will this stuff give you propulsion?" asked Bill.

"No. Only elevation. I use a motor burning fuel-oil; an improvement upon the Diesel engine."

"But you need a propeller. You haven't one."

"Oh, yes. It folds and lies flat against the shell. I open it when at a desired height. There are also disappearing wheels which enable me to roll it along the ground, as for instance when I entered this barn."

"WELL," said Bill, after a moment's wonder, "suppose this ship were attacked by machine guns, as mine was yesterday. What would happen?"

"Nothing, unless a bullet struck the generator and control. You could riddle the hull with bullets without affecting its elevation. You see, we are not riding on the air, we are neutralizing gravitation."

"A simple matter, then, to surround the machinery with armor plate, provided your shell would lift it."

"It will lift hundreds of tons provided enough current is applied to the Lewtonite."

"Complete mastery of the air," murmured Bill Robinson. "To-night, folks, we are all going to take a ride."

"I'll be delighted to demonstrate it," said the inventor.

"We are going to ride to New York and light upon the roof of an office building down town. No trouble about that, I suppose."

"None at all," replied Lewton. "But why a roof?"

"I've got a special reason. . . . Another question. How much does Lewtonite cost a ton, and can it be produced in large quantities?"

"It costs about six hundred dollars a ton, and can be manufactured in any quantity within reason."

"Enough to build a fleet of these things?"

"Thousands."

"No rare metal like radium in it?"

Lewton laughed. "There's tin in it. What do you think of that?"

"Great," laughed Bill. "No wonder you held out for ten millions."

They left the barn, and the guardian of the wonderful machine returned to its interior.

"Where is your other man?" asked Robinson.

"He's on guard about a hundred yards down the road."

"Right. After to-morrow you won't have to worry."

"Mr. Robinson," asked Jane, "may I—will you allow me to ride with you to New York in the airship?"

He laughed. "The trip would be dreadful without you. Why, if it hadn't been for your shrewdness and quick action, Lewton would be on to his way to England with that miracle. . . . We defy the laws of gravitation! What next?"

"I'd like a few minutes' private conversation with you, Bill," said the professor. "Let's walk down the road a bit—if Miss Gregg will excuse us."

"I'll talk to Mr. Lewton," she said, smiling.

"What's on your mind, Solomon?" demanded Robinson as they moved away arm in arm.

"You hired me as your business adviser," replied Smith reproachfully, "but you have paid no attention to me to-day."

"I was thinking things out."

"Well, I've been thinking things out, too. You have purchased a marvelous invention, the wonder of the age, an incredible creation."

"And got it cheap, considering."

"WHAT good will it do you?" demanded the professor sharply.

"Eh? Lots, I hope."

"You refuse to look facts in the face. You are practically bankrupt. To-morrow a receiver will be appointed for Robinson and Company. You won't have a penny."

"Cheerful, aren't you?"

"Practical, Bill. Reach told you that the cash in the Cosmos Bank was the property of your creditors. He was right. Being aware that you were hopelessly insolvent, you committed a crime in having that check certified. The certification will be canceled by a court order. Lewton will never be paid. Furthermore, you will go to jail for putting through this deal."

"I'll chance that. Lewton will present his check to-morrow morning. I am president of the bank. You bet your life he will get his money. By the time a court order gets there the deed will be done."

"I happen to know the law. Lewton will be forced to return his money and share and share alike with the other creditors."

"No, because I'll run him up to Canada in his machine with the cash."

"You're mad, Bill."

"They can't extradite Lewton for selling something, getting paid, and going to a foreign country with what is rightfully his. It's my opinion that I won't go into bankruptcy, and that nobody will try to make Lewton give up his cash. Furthermore, I intend to pay him the face value of the note for three millions."

"I don't see how."

Robinson laughed nervously. "I've got a plan, but it's still nebulous. I can't explain it. It sounds crazy, but by morning it will be worked out, and I'm willing to bet you a million—"

"You haven't got a million."

"Well, fifty cents, then—that everything is going to be all right."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUCCANEERS AT BAY.

A VERY much battered John Redding was in council with Samuel Bates on Eureka Island after the attempt to prevent the departure of Professor Smith and William Robinson had failed.

"You say he recognized you?" demanded Bates.

Redding nodded. "Called me a dirty traitor. I'd have finished him if he had not taken me unaware."

"Well, we're in a terrible jam," said Bates dolefully. "The damned inventor got away with his airship. We had Robinson in our hands and he was allowed to escape. Before we can get one of the blockading boats in by signaling, it will be too late to pursue him. We have four dead men on our hands, and a couple of wounded. We had better vamoose."

"And then what? Robinson will have me arrested for murder."

"That's your hard luck," replied Bates unfeelingly. "Try Central America for a vacation."

"Don't you get any idea that you are not in this as deeply as I am," Redding warned him. "You're the man of action, the great strategist—so you said. I gave you the information which would have made billionaires of us both, and depended upon you to do this job. You bungled it. Do you suppose I'm going to hide in Canada while you go on in Chicago as though nothing had happened?"

"In short, you'll give me away?"

"Yes," declared Redding. "We sink together or are saved together."

"Well, we have a chance yet," Bates said cheerfully. "It's evident that young Robinson is fully alive to the importance of getting hold of Lewton's invention, and I think he'll try to get on his trail without delaying to make charges against you. We don't know where Lewton has gone, but we can follow Robinson. The bottom fell out of his end of the stock market this afternoon, and I think he'll make immediately to New York, hoping to bolster up his interests in the market and receive some form of communication from Lewton. You've got the Lewton code book. If that nut still makes use of it, Robinson can't decipher it and you can get a copy of the message. That will enable us to find Lewton before Robinson, assuming that Lewton does send him a message."

"The code is on the way to Chicago," said Redding.

"You haven't got it with you?"

"I left it in my desk in New York—but I wired to a reliable person to send it to me special delivery."

"Of all the asinine— There are no reliable persons. You can't get it before to-morrow night, and we ought to be in New York to-morrow morning."

"If it left on the night plane it will be at my hotel in Chicago by the time we get there. Bates, the Lewton matter is of secondary importance. My safety and yours depends upon eliminating Robinson and Smith before they charge us with what happened on this island to-night."

Bates nodded grimly. "I realize that. And I'm going to make arrangements. Here comes one of the boats. We'll be ten minutes getting to Larkspur. The automobiles will be waiting to carry off the gang, and I'll take you in my plane to Chicago. If Robinson is returning to New York, he'll take the nine o'clock Eastingham express plane. If he leaves on it, we'll follow in one of the Consolidated busses and be there about as soon as he will. Come on."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IT PAYS TO OWE A HUNDRED MILLIONS!

CHESTER LEWTON'S grandmother set out an inviting supper in the low-ceiled and curiously papered dining room of the old house. For the most part it was a gay party

that sat down to assorted cold meats, hot biscuits, tea cakes and jam, washed down by tea and coffee.

Jane Gregg was ecstatically happy. Robinson had approved of all her actions, including the forgery of his name to a telegram, and seemed to find it necessary to press her hand every few minutes to reassure her of his gratitude. Chester Lewton had dropped tons of responsibility from his shoulders. His eyes sparkled joyfully. In his vest pocket was a certified check for seven million dollars, and he had none of the doubts of Professor Smith that it could not be cashed.

Smith was depressed because he was convinced that his friend had placed himself outside the law. Possession of the Lewton Aircar would not prevent Bill's punishment for illegal acts, and the marvelous invention would go with the rest of his assets to pay his creditors.

Lewton's tongue was loose with excitement, and he chattered during the meal, occasionally drawing out the check to show it to his grandparents and to assure them that they were rich beyond dreams of avarice.

Bill Robinson kept his eyes upon the profile of Jane Gregg as if for inspiration; and with the coffee it came.

"I want another conference with you, professor," Bill said gayly. "Stick around, Miss Gregg, because I may want to dictate a letter to you."

Lewton offered them the parlor, and Bill led the way in.

"I have no secrets from you, Miss Gregg," he declared, "and you may have some helpful suggestions to make. The professor is an expert in business administration, but he is so upright that he bends over backward. According to him, I'm going to land in jail for buying this invention."

"Oh, Mr. Robinson, I hope not!" cried the girl, her eyes growing big with fear, as her face drained of color.

"I hope not, too. But here are the facts. Eastingham and his gang kicked all my props out from under me today. Everything the firm was carrying on margin was lost. It appears that we got the money to buy the stocks on margin by going to the banks and hocking all the securities we owned outright. Thus it happens that a lot of banks are holding about two hundred million dollars, or half as much again of our securities, on demand notes. They can call those notes any time they want to, and I must return the money borrowed on them. Unfortunately the money is lost."

"In which case, of course, they sell your securities to repay themselves," said the professor.

"Unfortunately, the value of this two hundred million dollars' worth of securities has dropped to a point where the banks will lose a hundred million dollars if they sell them now. Do you understand, Miss Gregg?"

She was miserably mute, but she nodded. Inwardly she was overwhelmed with admiration for a man who could take his losses so lightly.

"We had a little over seven million in cash in the Cosmos Bank, which was all that was left of ten millions in cash that father had collected to buy Lewton's Aircar. Now Professor Smith maintains that this money belongs to the banks as part payment for my loans, and I have committed a crime by making use of it."

"I am afraid there is no doubt that you have done so," said the professor.

"But surely," exclaimed Jane, "when they learn that you have purchased an invention which must be worth many hundreds of millions—"

"That will go to his creditors, too," stated the professor glumly.

"I GUESS that's the legal aspect of the case," admitted Bill; "but it has occurred to me, being the son of my father who built up an enormous fortune by taking chances, that there is another side to the situation."

"I should like very much to know what it could be," said the professor.

"Well, banks can stand a certain amount of loss, but when it gets up into the hundreds of millions, they are pretty apt to go broke. And, if they go broke, their officers are likely to go to jail along with me for loaning me more money than the stocks seem to be worth."

"Which won't help you any," said Smith dryly.

"But, despite my enormous losses to-day, I am not bankrupt until these loans are called and I fail to pay them. Now if these bank officers—who are probably worrying more than I am—get a little ray of hope, maybe they will decide to wait and see if they can't get their money back."

"Bill, you can't give them that hope," mourned the professor.

"Can't I? I was just wondering what would happen if these bank presidents, when they open their newspapers to-morrow morning, should read that Robinson and Company, far from being on the rocks, has acquired an aircraft which can't fall, one which can land upon a ten cent piece anywhere at any time.

"And when they read further that this marvelous invention will sail down Broadway between the high buildings, and finally roost on top of the Cosmos Bank Building, I think they will go to their offices ready to listen to reason."

Jane clapped her hands. "Of course they will. And the announcement will stop the fall of your stocks. They may even rise."

"Miss Gregg," commanded Bill Robinson, "take a telegram."

Jane yanked notebook and pencil from her bag.

"ANNOUNCEMENT is made," began Robinson, "that Robinson and Company has purchased the Lewton Aircar for the sum of ten million dollars in cash, and will proceed to manufacture it at once upon a large scale.

"The Lewton Aircar, so-called, was invented and perfected by Chester Lewton, the world-renowned inventor, and the first car has been turned over to Robinson and Company for immediate operation. It is neither an aëroplane nor a gas balloon, and it acts independently of the atmosphere of the earth; thus it is impervious to wind or storm. Its elevation is not connected with its propulsion, therefore its engines may be stopped and it will float indefinitely at any height or descend, perfectly controlled, and alight upon any space slightly greater than its own dimensions, without the slightest shock. Thus the Lewton Aircar solves the problem of absolute safety in the air, and makes existing aircraft as obsolete as the high-wheeled bicycle.

"The Robinson Company proposes to place in operation immediately a line of Lewton Aircars between New York and Chicago, and in two or three years there is little doubt that they will replace all other forms of air transit.

"Being independent of the atmosphere, the Lewton Aircar cannot be shot down in action, and the nation possessing it will obtain mastery of the air without difficulty.

"The existence of the Lewton

miracle has been known in certain quarters for months, and the inventor has been showered with offers for it, but he considered himself bound by an agreement with the late William Robinson to turn it over to Robinson and Company. Forty-eight hours ago he notified William Robinson, son of the murdered magnate, and now head of the company, that the first car was ready for delivery. Mr. Robinson, accompanied by his vice president, Irving Smith, left New York in a Copeland twenty-passenger plane for Michigan City near which Mr. Lewton's manufacturing establishment is located.

"En route, the plane was attacked by an airplane armed with machine guns and shot down, but Mr. Robinson continued on by motor and joined Mr. Lewton at his estate on Eureka Island, where the deal was consummated.

"Accompanied by the inventor and his staff, Mr. Robinson and Professor Smith came east in the Lewton Aircar, which worked perfectly, and made the trip in two hours less than record time.

"There is no doubt in the mind of Mr. Robinson that the attack upon his west-bound plane, and the simultaneous attack upon Robinson securities upon the stock market, were inspired by business rivals who realized the devastating effect upon the present manufacture and operation of airplanes which the Lewton Aircar would produce.

"Fortunately Mr. Robinson had taken every precaution to protect his interests in New York, and did not permit machine gun bullets to prevent the conclusion of the greatest business transaction of many years. All Robinson aircraft factories will be converted to the manufacture of the Aircar, and all existing Robinson air lines will be equipped with them in very short time.

"As a demonstration to the American people of the astonishing qualities of the Aircar, Mr. Lewton, accompanied by Mr. Robinson and Mr. Smith, will appear over New York City at nine thirty this morning, and at Madison Square Garden will descend to the height of one hundred and fifty feet, and proceed down Broadway between the great skyscrapers as far as the Cosmos Bank Building, when it will ascend and deposit its passengers upon the roof of that building, which contains the main offices of Robinson and Company."

THE author of this proclamation paused for breath and to give the flying pencil time to catch up with him.

"What do you think of that, Smithie?" he demanded.

"Most interesting. Just what do you expect to accomplish with it?"

"I'm sending it out to all the New York newspapers, signed by my name, and it will hit the front page of all to-morrow's morning papers. The bankers who expected to call my loans when business commences to-morrow, will read it and be impressed. They will expect a rise in Robinson securities which may pull them out of their hole.

"The public will read it and wait for my demonstration; and when it has been accomplished they will get hold of their brokers and throw on the market their shares of opposition air companies. When the market opens my stocks will go up and Eastingham's stocks will go down. About noon the bankers will probably be calling the Eastingham loans instead of the Robinson loans."

"By George, it's possible! And what then?"

"Why, I'm not broke. If I've lost control of the Robinson Air Companies, due to being sold out yesterday, I should worry. I can start a new concern to manufacture Aircars, and get all the money I want from public subscription. Airplane stocks won't be worth a nickel a week after New York has seen what this invention can do."

"I think it's masterly," declared Jane Gregg. "It's a stroke of genius."

"The creditor who tries to put the owner of the Lewton Aircar into bankruptcy after this ballyhoo will be laughed out of court," declared Bill. "Eastingham and his gang will be so busy trying to save their own securities that they won't have time to meddle with me. And I'll be able to cash that check for Lewton and pay him my note for three millions without the slightest protest."

"Then you won't want to go to New York to-night in the machine?" asked Smith.

"Certainly we shall. This is nearly as lonesome a hide-out as Eureka Island, and you know what happened there. Bates and Redding didn't stay on that island, and Bates looks to me like a fellow who won't give up until he's cut into pieces. How do we know they haven't trailed us? After I've paid seven millions in cash for that thing out in the barn, do you suppose I'm going to take a chance of its being blown up? I've promised New York a demonstration to-morrow morning, and I've got to make good or I'm finished."

"But we're safer here than anywhere," protested Smith.

Bill laughed. "I'm going down to the telegraph office and send this to the New York papers. When I return we'll get into the Aircar and go to New York. We'll land on the roof of the Eastingham Building around midnight and be all ready for our demonstration in the morning."

"The Eastingham Building!" cried both Smith and Jane Gregg.

"Sure. It's the last place where they would think of looking for us. Miss Gregg, would you like to take a ride down to the telegraph office with me?"

"I surely would," she declared.

"Smith, you stay here and help Lewton guard the treasure. Tell him the program. I wonder how we'll get to town."

"Walk down the road till we find a house with a phone, and send for a taxi," said Jane.

Shortly after half past seven Robinson and Jane, who carried the message which was to retrieve the fortunes of Robinson and Company, climbed into the station Ford and were rattled away toward town. Smith sought out Lewton and explained the astonishing project of his friend.

"I'm afraid Bill went off half-cocked," he concluded. "Could you really operate that affair in the cañons of lower New York?"

"Why not?" demanded the inventor. "Speed has nothing to do with our keeping in the air. I simply set my magnetizer at one hundred and fifty feet above the street, and travel as slowly as ten miles an hour, if necessary. An airplane is very badly controlled. To get into the air, very great speed is required, and only high speed will keep it afloat; but we have even more directional control than an eight-cylinder automobile. I can throttle down to three or four miles an hour, or remain motionless in space as I desire."

"Well, it will be an interesting experience," stated the still dubious professor.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FACE IN THE STATION WINDOW.

"THE more I think about it," said Jane Gregg, "the more delighted I am that this wonderful machine of Mr. Lewton has come into your hands instead of some unscrupulous person's. Why, with it he could overturn civilization!"

"Do you admire modern civilization?" asked Bill.

"Well, of course it isn't perfect, but it is the nearest to perfection we have been able to achieve."

"There's a lot wrong with it," Bill replied soberly. "Here is a nation of one hundred and thirty or forty millions of people, and they permit half a dozen men to get possession of all their industries. I don't blame my father for taking advantage of conditions to make himself tremendously powerful, but such conditions should not exist. If I fall, Eastingham will absolutely control everything. Give him this invention and you have a dictatorship of the United States."

"But you will be just as much of a dictator."

"Not I," he declared. "All I want to do is to pull myself out of my hole and smash the people who killed my father and his partners. When I accomplish that I'm going to turn the secret of Lewtonite over to the United States Government. I'll arrange to have the government manufacture these machines and lease them to transportation companies. That will prevent their manufacture for and by other governments. Poor Lewton, if he had carried out his threat of taking the Aircar to England he would have been the greatest traitor ever born in America, for he would have enabled Great Britain to dictate to the United States. I have you to thank for preventing such a catastrophe. You're a pretty wonderful girl, Jane Gregg."

Jane blushed and was silent.

"Funny thing, I was attracted to you that night when I was leaving the office. You were different from the mob of girls in the place. I never noticed anything about them. You were so neat and trim and sort of—er—plainly dressed."

"I was hideously dressed," she declared impulsively.

"Looked all right to me. Well, I was tickled when you turned out to be so loyal. I wanted to make you my secretary only I had appointed Miss Nevin. There's something about her I don't like."

"I hate to say it, but I suspect Miss Nevin is giving information to the Eastingham offices," she said slowly. She told him about the telephone call which had so embarrassed the secretary.

"Well, everybody seemed to know I was going to Michigan City, and a warm reception was arranged for me. Say, even when that cat, Miss Nevin, reported that you had vanished with another code telegram, I was certain that you were all right. I'll say you were all right. Tell me how you got the code and how you found out about everything."

Modestly Jane told her story and was rewarded by his enthusiastic admiration. He was still exclaiming when they arrived at the telegraph office.

"Send a copy of this dispatch to the editors of all the New York papers," Bill instructed the operator.

"Sorry, but we have to have a copy for each paper. It's a rule."

"If you'll let me use a typewriter I'll make the copies," said Jane.

SHE was supplied with a machine and in a few minutes was tapping off carbons of the announcement at a high rate of speed. Bill watched her white fingers fly, in astonishment.

The operator took the first page from her machine and laid it on the counter.

"Send it at once," commanded Robinson.

"Got to send these first, sir," said the little man who was operating the key.

Drawing a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet Bill showed it to him.

"Try breaking a rule for a change," he suggested. The operator picked up the dispatch and started to read it. His eyes began to stick out.

"Criminy," he exclaimed. "You bet I'll send it. Are you Mr. Robinson?"

"Yes."

"And this machine is right here, in our town!"

"It was, but it has gone to New York," replied Robinson, lying discreetly.

At the end of half an hour the dispatches were on their way. Bill and Jane waited until the last word had been clicked off.

"Lock the copy up in your safe," commanded Robinson. "And put a padlock on your mouth. If any news of this gets out in Wallingford before to-morrow morning I'll know who's responsible."

"You can rely on me, sir. This thing actually flies without depending on the air?"

"That's right."

"And it can't fall?"

"No chance of it."

"Gee," exclaimed the operator. "Well, I'm going to try flying when those things get into operation."

They left the telegraph office and walked to the station for a taxi. Robinson helped the girl into the Ford, and as she seated herself she saw a man with his hat pulled down over his forehead look out of the window of the railroad waiting room. She stared and gasped; the face vanished.

Bill got in beside her, and the car started off.

"Mr. Robinson," she said softly. "Just as we left I saw a man looking out the station window at us and I am almost positive it was Mr. Redding."

"Eh? You're sure?"

"I can't be sure, but I worked with him for some time and I know him very well. He has rather a prominent jaw."

"So they trailed us here. Trouble's brewing. You get out of the car and go to a hotel."

"No! Please don't make me!"

"But why? There is no reason why you should run a risk."

"I—I want to," said Jane, almost in a whisper.

"You darling. Well, I'll tell the man to step on the gas."

He spoke to the driver, who began to drive the old car at top speed. As the car swayed Jane fell against him, and Bill passed his left arm about her. His right hand went to his hip pocket, from which he drew the revolver which had stood him in such good stead the night before.

HE looked back and saw what he feared he might—the gleam of headlights, a few hundred yards behind. They were still on the State road and it was much traveled, so the

car in the rear might have no significance; but a quarter of a mile beyond they would have to turn into a dirt road which led to Lewton's. If the following car also turned down that road Bill knew what it meant.

The car behind was coming up rapidly and its headlights bathed the occupants of the open roadster in their radiance, but the side road was reached while the pursuer was still a hundred feet back. Bill had turned sidewise so that he could keep an eye upon the back stretch, and he saw the other car enter the dirt road after them. Immediately its horn began to honk for passage, and the driver of the Ford courteously swerved over to the right to permit the larger machine to pass. It came up. Its headlights were no longer blinding as they fell upon the road at the left and Bill saw two men in a big roadster.

Instead of darting past, the roadster slowed and crept up on the Ford. Bill saw the well-known countenance of Redding at the right, beside the chauffeur, and saw him peering at the occupants of the Ford. He saw Redding lift his hand. Without the slightest compunction Robinson opened fire. One of the bullets struck John Redding, who had half risen to his feet. Another apparently struck the driver of the car in the arm, for the roadster immediately ran into the ditch. The battle was over before it started. Not a shot had come from the enemy. With a sickening grind of metal the roadster crashed into a stone wall.

Jane Gregg gritted her teeth and made no sound. The chauffeur of the Ford, without orders, stepped on the gas and rattled up the road at top speed. A little shaken, Bill Robinson thrust the empty revolver back in his pocket and shouted to the driver to stop. The Wallingford taxi man heeded him not, and while Bill was still expostulating he drew up in front of the Preston's.

Lewton, Smith and the two mechanics were standing in the road as the car stopped. Alarmed by the shots which they had distinctly heard, all had rushed out of the house.

"What happened?" cried Lewton. "We heard firing."

"There's been murder back there," shouted the chauffeur. "This here feller shot two men in a car that was passing, and I guess he would have killed me if I hadn't stepped on the gas. I knew he wouldn't shoot me while I was going sixty miles an hour."

"Redding and, I presume, Bates, were in the other car," explained Bill to Lewton and Smith. "Jane recognized him at the station and he followed us until we turned up this road. Then they signaled to pass, slowed up as they came alongside of us and I'm certain Redding had a gun in his hand and was going to fire despite the presence of a woman in the car. I had my gun in hand and fired first, that's all."

"It was cold-blooded murder," yammered the driver. "I call on you gents to arrest that man." The villager was hysterical.

"You know me," said Lewton soothingly. "If there has been murder committed the killer will be punished. First we shall go back with you and find out what has happened."

"What; with him?" The taxi man's teeth rattled.

"We have reason to believe that there were two criminals in that car who intended to kill Mr. Robinson, and he fired in self-defense. Get back behind your wheel and take us to the scene of the—er—accident. You two

men watch the house. Robinson and Smith and myself will attend to this."

"They won't arrest you, will they?" asked Jane tearfully.

Bill pressed her hand. "Not a chance. You go in the house and wait for us."

IN five minutes the taxi stopped at the spot where the roadster had met its fate. As the road was scantily traveled, no Samaritans had come on the scene. The incident had occurred in a wooded section with a two-foot ditch at either side of the road and the roadster had slewed off into the ditch, run up its farther side, and plunged against a stone wall which telescoped the radiator, smashed all the glass in the windshield, and ended the career of an unusually fine automobile.

Redding had slid off the seat and lay upon the floor of the car, while Samuel Bates sat stiffly behind his wheel. Bates's face was frightfully cut, his right arm was bleeding from a flesh wound and his neck was broken from the shock of the collision. He was quite dead.

Redding was still alive. His fall had saved him from broken glass, but he had a bullet wound in the chest and one in the right shoulder. When they lifted him out they found an automatic pistol where it had fallen when Robinson's bullets had entered his body.

Lewton pointed this out to the taxi driver. "Mr. Robinson fired in self-defense, just as he said," he declared. "And the other man was killed by the smash-up."

Professor Smith examined Redding and found him still alive; but he was unable to determine whether the chest wound was mortal. It was necessary to lift Redding and transport him in the Ford to the Lewton homestead, but he did not recover consciousness during the trip and was still unconscious when he was laid upon old Mrs. Preston's best bed.

"You'll have to go for a doctor," Lewton told the taxi driver. "Remember, this man's life depends on your speed, and you mustn't stop anywhere to notify the police. You can do that after you have returned here with the doctor."

"Meanwhile that murderer may get away," protested the taxi man, who was obsessed with the idea that Robinson had fired in cold blood.

"I'll put two men in charge of him to see that he doesn't," replied the inventor. "Don't waste a minute. Get started."

"All right. Remember, you're responsible," the chauffeur warned him.

Smith had done his best to stanch the flow of blood and Jane installed herself as nurse of the man whose secretary she once had been.

Lewton motioned to Bill and led him from the room.

"That stupid driver is a man of one idea," he said. "He'll come back with the doctor and the sheriff and you'll land in jail as sure as fate. I fancy it doesn't coincide with your plans."

"Of course not, but what can we do?"

"We'll leave one of my men and Miss Gregg with Redding and my grandparents, and the rest of us will get into the Aircar and escape before the taxi man returns."

"It's rather cowardly to run away," replied Bill thoughtfully. "And I promised to take Miss Gregg with us, but I'm sure she will understand. All right. Let's get started."

He explained briefly to Jane, and she

nodded comprehension, and then he accompanied Lewton to the barn. The doors were opened, they stepped into the car, Lewton and his assistant entered the engine room and pilot house and closed the door behind them, and a second later the car rolled out on the driveway.

They waited expectantly for a moment. "Wonder why we don't rise?" said Bill.

Smith looked through a porthole. "We have risen!" he exclaimed, almost frightened. "I can see the lights of Wallingford far below us."

Bill joined him and looked from the sky down upon the earth.

"It just doesn't seem possible," he muttered. "It's necromancy."

CHAPTER XXX.

MAN-MADE CAÑONS.

THE low hum of the engine was heard, the door opened and Lewton joined them.

"We'll be in New York in about an hour. You spoke of landing upon the roof of Eastingham's office building. I doubt if we can pick it out from the air at night."

"Well, that was just an idea. Let's land upon the roof of some high building which you cannot mistake. Say the Metropolitan Life Building. In that way we'll be in position for our parade down Broadway in the morning. You'll have no trouble locating that, because it's on Madison Square. I'd rather not be seen to-night by New Yorkers."

"Well, that's a pointed tower, isn't it?"

"Yes, but land on the level roof of the main part of the building."

"All right," said Lewton. "We have no lights, we shall fly very high and descend rapidly and vertically. I'll land you on the roof of the Metropolitan Life."

"Any danger of the roof caving in?"

The inventor laughed.

"Oh, no. It is built to withstand a much greater weight than this car. For that matter, I can adjust the magnetizer so that we won't weigh more than a few pounds as we rest on the roof."

"How about sleeping arrangements?" asked Smith.

"I'm sorry; there are none. I didn't bother to equip the interior of the car. Time for that later."

Shortly after ten o'clock a gray shadow stole down from the sky and roosted in the center of the roof of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building, ensconced near its lofty tower. The three men played cards for a couple of hours and then made themselves as comfortable as possible upon the wall benches. Robinson and Smith, both exhausted by the excitement of the past few days, immediately fell asleep, as did the mechanic, but Lewton did not close an eye. He was human enough to enjoy glory and the picturesque demonstration conceived by Robinson appealed to his imagination.

Bill had predicted that his announcement would make the front page of the morning papers, but he was not enough of a journalist to know that most papers would devote the entire front page to the most astounding piece of news which had come into editorial offices since the war. Many of the accounts were skeptical; all were cautious; but all were prominent and excited.

At seven o'clock Lewton was aware of a pounding upon the side of the car. He looked out through a porthole

and saw a watchman hitting the Lewtonite with a cane.

He opened the door and poked his head out, and the man ceased his tattoo and addressed him.

"What's this thing, and what are you doing here?" he demanded. "You ain't got no right to put all this weight on the roof—and who gave you permission to come here, anyway?"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the inventor, laughing.

"I'm going to report you. What's your name?"

"Oh, my name is Lewton."

The watchman's mouth opened in amazement.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Is this the airship the papers are full of this morning?"

"I haven't seen the papers yet."

"Is this the Lewton Aircar?"

"That is just what it is."

"I want to know! Say, can I look inside?"

"Sure. Take a look." He drew back and the watchman entered, waking the three sleepers.

"Can you imagine this?" the fellow marveled. "It hasn't got no wings or anything. How do you make it go?"

BILL rubbed his eyes and grinned at the visitor.

"This is Mr. William Robinson, who owns the Aircar," said Lewton.

"How are you?" demanded Bill. "What do you think of us?"

"I'll believe it when I see it," replied the watchman.

"How do you suppose we got up here?"

The man scratched his head. "Well, I don't quite know."

"How did you know we were here?" asked Lewton.

"I was making my rounds in the tower, and I spotted you down here. You can't stay here, gents, without a permit."

All four men laughed. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"I could have you arrested."

"We'd better get out of here," said Bill with a chuckle.

"All right," replied the inventor. "Suppose we just move off the roof and hang over Madison Square at an elevation of a thousand feet. That ought to be good advertising."

"You don't happen to have a newspaper with you?" asked Smith.

The watchman drew the *Times* from his pocket and passed it over. Even that staid, conservative newspaper had broken into an eight-column head over Robinson's "unconfirmed" announcement of the Lewton Aircar.

"That's a lot better than I expected," Bill commented, as he glanced at the headlines. "If you can actually remain suspended in air without moving, I think we might float a while over Madison Square. We can be seen from all over New York and get a billion dollars' worth of publicity."

"Just get back on the roof," suggested Lewton to the watchman.

"Oh, say, I guess you can stay here," said the watchman, reluctant to depart.

"No, we like the other idea better. Outside."

They had to push him out, and then closed the door.

Lewton vanished into the control room, and the passengers, looking out of the portholes, became aware that they were rising.

They heard the engine start, and a moment later they were motionless, a thousand feet in air. From the windows the professor and his employer

saw a commotion among the ants below. In fifteen minutes the square was black with people, and in an hour every window in that part of New York was jammed with occupants, while the mob below caused the suspension of all ground traffic.

At nine thirty exactly, Lewton permitted the car to sink slowly to a couple of hundred feet and then rose rapidly again as he saw that a panic had started below. He moved over Broadway, leaving the stampede to adjust itself. At Twenty-Third Street there are few high buildings, and he dared not descend to the level of the roof tops for fear of alarming the multitude which packed the street from one building line to the other.

At a speed of about fifteen miles an hour the great gray egg sauntered along, and the passengers, opening the portholes, were able to hear the thunder from the mobs below.

At Canal Street the car sank fifty feet lower and began to pass tall buildings upon the level of the windows in the upper floors.

Not since the triumphal progress of Lindbergh along the streets of New York had the city been treated to so much excitement. The town was wild. The approach of the car was heralded by mad cheering. It threaded its way down the narrow street, its passengers waving from their portholes, and the occupants of business offices going entirely insane. High above, a swarm of aëroplanes filled the air. Newspaper planes swooped as low as they dared, to make pictures, but none ventured to enter the wind-treacherous cañon of Broadway. Only the Lewton Aircar could do that.

The air was rent with the shrieking of sirens, the ringing of bells, the honk of thousands of auto horns, and the frenzied cries of the population. Tears were rolling down the cheeks of Smith and Bill Robinson, and presently they were hugging each other. It is impossible for any human being not to be moved by the adulation of millions of people.

SLOWLY the car moved on. Upon the roof of the New York *Sun* Building stood a mob of camera men and most of the occupants of the building. Lewton dropped to the height of a hundred feet for their benefit.

And then they passed over City Hall Park and plunged into the zone of forty or fifty story buildings. Now the buildings towered high above the Aircar, and the street narrowed so that there was only twenty or twenty-five feet margin on either side.

It was the most dangerous part of the trip, and the passengers had only Lewton's word that the Aircar could accomplish it, but their confidence in him was not shaken. And the car moved majestically through the middle of the cañon. Ahead was the great Cosmos Bank Building, and Lewton began to soar. Up, up to a height of three hundred feet, and then he discovered that the roof was black with people.

Not perturbed, he floated fifty feet above them, while Robinson thrust his head out the window and ordered that the roof be cleared.

A great cheer burst from his employees as he was recognized; then the car began to descend. In five minutes the Aircar came to rest upon the roof.

"You stand by the car, Lewton," Bill commanded. "Come on, Smith. I'm going down to my office to find out if this circus business has done us any good."

They went down in the elevator and entered the Robinson offices, where most of the employees had preceded them, and again they cheered until Bill flushed and waved his hands and implored them to stop.

Immediately there was dead silence in the place.

"Business as usual," was all he said, but there was a great laugh, and the place immediately began to hum with industry.

Robinson passed into his private office and found it occupied. Sitting beside his desk, nervously twisting his fingers, was a curious-looking old gentleman whom he had never met before, but whom he had no difficulty in recognizing.

"Good morning, Mr. Eastingham," Bill said impudently. "I expected you, but not so early."

Old Enoch's dour face cracked in a wry grin.

"Market opens in ten minutes," he said curtly. "You and I have to have an understanding before it opens."

Bill sat himself in his big chair and regarded the great enemy of his father with exultation. Until he found the old man in his office he had no assurance that his coup had succeeded. Now he knew it.

"Considering that you and your gang have been doing your best to ruin me during the past couple of days," he said coolly, "you have considerable of a gall."

"We *have* ruined you," replied Eastingham. "You haven't got a sou to your name, according to all the rules of the game we play in the Street. Your loans will be called within an hour after the banks open, and then where will you be?"

"Sitting pretty," replied Robinson. "Your spies gave you wrong ideas about the condition of Robinson and Company, Mr. Eastingham. Did you happen to see my arrival at the office this morning in my new car?"

Enoch nodded. "I saw it. That's why I'm here. As I said, you are a ruined man. All I have to do is put the screws on."

"Well, what detains you?" Bill asked insolently.

Enoch, New Englander that he was, gave a dry chuckle at himself. "Because there'll be a panic on the market in about ten minutes, and I'm liable to be ruined myself. So I thought we might get together."

ROBINSON regarded him unmoved. "I have a suspicion that you had some connection with the murder of my father and his partners," he said slowly. "And I can't do business with you."

"Eh? Boy, you must be crazy!" The old man got up and towered over him. "You fool! Do you think I'm a murderer?"

"I don't know what to think."

"But you know now since Redding confessed."

"Do you mean to say Redding has confessed?" gasped the astonished youth.

"You shot him. Mean to say you don't know it? Haven't you seen the latest extras?"

"I left Wallingford immediately after the affair. I know nothing. It wasn't in the early morning editions."

"Time enough for that. This Aircar took me completely by surprise, Robinson. I had hired Redding, but he told me nothing. It was a private enterprise of Redding, and your man Bates, the scoundrels. Never mind that now. You'll be convinced that my skirts are clean. I did try to smash you

in the market, as I would smash any man who opposed me. That's over. Now, here's my proposition. I'll push up all your securities to the point at which they were when the raid on them began, and I'll guarantee your credit and save the stocks held by the banks, if you'll agree to give me a half interest in this damn thing of Lewton's."

Robinson laughed in his face. "I'm not a business man, but I'm no fool. My loans won't be called, because my securities will be sky high by the close of the market to-day. And I am afraid that all your air stocks will hit the bottom, which will serve you jolly well right. If you can show that your hands are clean in connection with the death of my father, I'll probably be more merciful to you than you would have been to me."

"Redding's confession will satisfy you of that. It is in the latest editions. It was made in the presence of the sheriff of Wallingford and your secretary, Miss Gregg. Thanks to the crash in your securities, Robinson, I have unlimited funds, and I can support my interests. I admit that this Aircar of yours will smash me in a week or two, but not before you are down and out, too. And there is an excellent possibility that the Aircar may come to me as part of your assets, in which case I'll be stronger than ever."

"Then why dicker with me?" asked Bill, who was impressed despite his apparent indifference.

Eastingham sat down again. "Because I'm an old man and I play safe. I had you apparently in my hands and you wriggle out and play a trump card. The city has gone mad about your car. You might be able to use it to lift yourself out of your difficulty. I don't think so, I don't see how you could, but there is a possibility of it. I offer a flag of truce."

"I have no intention of putting into your hands the power the Aircar will give you, Mr. Eastingham. I have good reason not to trust you and your associates. I know exactly how I am going to proceed, and you won't be able to make me a bankrupt." He paused, and he noticed that the knuckles of Eastingham's hands were white from the tenseness with which he was clenching them.

"On the other hand, I don't like business, and I am not adapted for it. I would like to retire with flying colors. I don't want the people who invested with my father to lose their money from lack of confidence in me. . . . This is what I will do. If you will take over my business for what it was worth the day my father died, if you will give tangible guarantees of fair play, I shall make arrangements to turn the Aircar and the secret of its construction over to the United States government—"

"You are crazy!" cried Eastingham.

"Which will manufacture it in quantity and lease cars for passenger transportation to all air lines, yours and mine alike."

"But the government is incompetent to run industries—"

"Not necessarily. In this case we'll make sure that it becomes competent. This invention which overcomes the laws of gravitation cannot be intrusted to private ownership, yours or mine, or any one's. And such a deal will save the airplane industry from ruin."

Eastingham considered. He was silent for fully a minute when the ticker in the corner of the room woke into activity.

"Done!" he exclaimed. "I'll arrange for the taking over of your busi-

ness upon equitable terms, valuation as of the date of the death of your father. These details can be arranged. Call in your secretary and we'll draw up a joint statement. In a few minutes there will be a panic on the Exchange. We've got to act quickly to stop it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PRICE OF AMBITION.

JOHN REDDING recovered consciousness about 10.30 P.M. and found a doctor bending over him and Jane Gregg in attendance. He recognized the girl who had been his secretary and glanced at her in bewilderment.

"What happened?" he asked hoarsely. "Where is Bates?"

"I regret to have to tell you that your companion in the automobile is dead," said the physician. "He died instantly, his neck broken by the shock of collision. You are badly wounded, Mr. Redding."

"Fatally?" asked Redding feebly. His eyes sought the physician piteously.

The doctor did not answer.

"I'm going to die? Is that it?" he persisted. "I seem to feel sure of it."

"I am afraid there is very little hope," the country doctor admitted gently.

Redding closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them and looked wildly around. "Miss Gregg . . . Jane," he pleaded. "Do you think so?"

"I am afraid so," said Jane.

"Oh, my God! I don't want to die."

"You tried to kill Mr. Robinson," exclaimed the girl. "You tried to blow up Mr. Lewton in his house. Mr. Robinson thinks you were responsible for the bomb which killed his father. And you are afraid to die yourself?"

"I had nothing to do with that bomb," he said shrilly. "I swear it. It was Bates who did it. I didn't know what he had in mind until it was too late."

"Do you wish to make a statement?" asked the doctor who had heard Jane's charges with astonishment.

"No—yes—are you sure I am going to die?"

"You are bleeding to death internally," replied the physician. "And nothing can be done to stop it. I suggest you make any statement that will relieve your soul. I take it you have crimes on your conscience."

Redding closed his eyes and a spasm of pain crossed his face.

"I—I would like to make a statement," he said slowly. "I owe it to myself. I have done things that I am —not proud of—but I don't want the world to think I killed Mr. Robinson."

Jane produced paper and pencil. "I'll take your dictation, Mr. Redding," she said gently.

AMONG well-meaning and hopeful people it is accepted as an axiom that education will eliminate crime, though human history has been a refutation of that theory since there have been historians to record it. Both John Redding and Samuel Bates were college men. Both had demonstrated ability and risen high in the business world. Yet the president of New York and Transcontinental Railroad, and the president of Consolidated Express Airways landed on an island in Lake Michigan with rifles in their hands, engaged in a criminal enterprise, and were guilty of murder. Two of Chester Lewton's men had met death

at the hands of their followers and four of their own hirelings had been slain by the defenders of the island.

A surprising percentage of the gang murders in this country is done at the behest of individuals standing high in their communities; every now and then one of these cowardly instigators of slaughter is unmasked and punished as he deserves, but most of them escape. The difference between such criminals and Messrs. Bates and Redding was their personal direction of the murderous encounter.

Six months before, John Redding would have shuddered at the thought of breaking the law in any manner except patronizing bootleggers. He was an alert business man who had risen some distance and was going much higher. His best efforts were given to the firm of Robinson and Company and his ambition was to be admitted to partnership. He believed that honesty was the best policy and loyalty to his employer certain of reward. He had discarded all principles except self-interest; if asked to handle a dubious transaction for Robinson's, he would have plunged into it with enthusiasm. Anything to win the favor of the greatest man of American finance.

Redding had been assigned by William Robinson to follow up the Chester Lewton matter, and after several letters and telegrams in code from the inventor he had faithfully placed the proposition before his chief.

Robinson was frankly skeptical.

"This man Lewton is clever," he declared, "but like a great many able investigators he has been fascinated by the impossible. To overcome the law of gravitation is as impossible as turning base metals into gold, which misled the efforts and wasted the time of most of the scientists in the Middle Ages. However, better arrange a meeting with him and find out if he has really made any progress. See this model he talks about. If it works, we'll give him plenty of funds to continue."

Redding was met by Lewton at Michigan City and transported in his boat plane to Eureka Island. The inventor had a four-foot model of an airship made of Lewtonite, minus an engine, and magnetized by wires from the ground. He gave an astonishing demonstration of elevation and descent and asked for a hundred thousand dollars to build a shop in which the big Aircar could be constructed.

Upon his return to New York, Redding reported what he had seen and the credit was granted. Shortly afterward, Mr. Robinson made a secret trip to Eureka Island, talked with the inventor, saw his model, and bound himself to take the thing off Lewton's hands for the enormous sum of ten millions and a royalty. Redding was assigned to other matters and had no further communication with Robinson. The code book reposed in the desk of William Robinson.

The miracle which was being accomplished upon Eureka, however, had taken hold of the imagination of John Redding. Its revolutionary effect upon world transportation continued to present itself to him.

ITS possessor could dictate terms to the world. He knew that Robinson would use it to vanquish his enemies and to get complete control of American industry upon which he had, already, a partial grip. It seemed unfair to John Redding that to him who had should be given.

Redding, however, could think of no way in which the Lewton Airship

might come into his possession. It was not until he shared his knowledge with Sam Bates that the way presented itself.

He had known Bates for several years. They were boon companions when the Chicago man visited New York, which was frequently. Bates had energy, audacity and no scruples. Bates, enthused, was willing to sell his soul to get possession of the invention. They planted a spy on Eureka Island, and learned that the machine was practically finished and Lewton about to turn it over to Robinson. Redding knew the hour of the meeting when the momentous deal was to be put through, and Bates assured him that means would be taken to prevent it.

The means horrified Redding, but he could do nothing then; and with growing eagerness he hastened to take advantage of the crime. He stole the code book from the desk of the late William Robinson, and removed, as he thought, all traces of the negotiations between the firm and the inventor. Then, to cover himself, he applied to Eastingham for a job and got it.

The dying man insisted to Jane Gregg that he did not dream that his confederate planned to slaughter the members of the firm of Robinson and Company, but when the deed was done, he was tied tight to Samuel Bates and had to take orders from him.

Lewton, after the assassination, had lost his patron and was too suspicious of other big business men to approach them. Bates went to him with a partnership proposition which was brusquely rejected. Thereupon Bates instructed Redding to assure the inventor that he, Redding, would induce young Robinson to carry out his father's bargain. For a couple of weeks Lewton was lulled by the assurances of Redding and then, growing suspicious, wired direct to Bill Robinson.

The wire arrived upon the morning of the day when Bates and Redding had decided to swoop down upon the island and capture the Lewton Aircar, and Bates showed himself in the office of William Robinson at noon to establish his presence in New York upon that day in case of future inquiry. Redding, reluctantly drawn into the piratical enterprise, had left for Chicago the night before and in his haste had forgotten the Lewton code book.

Bates, after leaving the office of Robinson, went at once to the air field where he discovered that William Robinson had ordered a special Copeland plane to leave for Michigan City at two thirty. Bates guessed what that meant. Lewton had got in touch with young Robinson; they were to meet that night and close the deal. This must be prevented at all hazards.

As an active aviator, Samuel Bates knew where, in New York, he could find what he needed. Half an hour after the departure of the Copeland plane, Bates left a private landing field in Long Island in an old army combat plane which was fast enough to overtake the big passenger airship. He caught it a hundred miles east of Michigan City and smothered it with machine gun bullets; he even dared to fly low and send a volley into it as it lay on the ground, after which he flew on to Chicago and disposed of the armed plane in a safe place.

THANKS to the Chicago newspapers which got out extras, he learned that the passengers on the Copeland were safe and continuing their journey; and he also learned that

among the passengers was Margaret Eastingham, the girl with whom he considered himself in love.

He was thankful for her safety, of course. Had he known she was on board, he would not have attacked the big passenger plane. However, he sent several ruffians to Michigan City to dispose of Robinson upon his arrival there, while he himself joined Redding, collected his gang, and in speedboats crossed the lake to Eureka Island.

Aware that there was a possibility of Robinson escaping the trap laid for him in Michigan City, Bates landed most of his men and then sent the speedboats out on patrol. After that, they boldly rushed the bungalow of Chester Lewton.

The inventor, however, was not caught napping and he and his four assistants opened fire upon the storming party and drove them back. What happened afterward on the island was well known.

Next morning, Bates and Redding had the impudence to fly to New York in one of the airplanes belonging to the employer whose life Bates had sought. They arrived at the Municipal Field shortly after the arrival of the Eastingham plane carrying Bill Robinson and his companion.

The telephone operator at Robinson's was in the pay of Eastingham, and through her Redding was able to trace the phone call from Jane Gregg to Wallingford, Connecticut. The pair arrived in Wallingford about 6 P.M., having driven over the road in Redding's motor. Bates was at the wheel and drove the car at a speed beyond the imagination of John Redding.

At the station they were unable to discover where Robinson had gone, but they were both convinced that he had gone to meet Lewton. As it happened, the taxi which had conveyed Bill and the professor out to the farmhouse was not at the station because the chauffeur had gone home to supper. So the pair were left to cool their heels upon the station platform until Bill and Miss Gregg arrived there in search of a taxi. Then came their disastrous attempt at murder.

Redding's statement was properly witnessed and a copy carried off by the sheriff who gave it to the local newspaper men. Thus it was that Eastingham had read in the late morning newspapers the confession of his criminal employee as well as the coup which had been pulled off by Bill Robinson, and was able to prove to the young financier that he was entirely innocent of complicity in the bomb episode.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SIGNING TREATIES.

OLD Enoch admitted, after he and Robinson had signed a statement which averted a tremendous crash upon the stock market, that he had spies galore in the Robinson offices.

"Why not?" Enoch wanted to know. "Your father always learned what I was going to do a few minutes after I made my decisions. It's business, my boy."

"Well, I don't want anything to do with it. I don't like it."

Enoch chuckled.

"You've done pretty well. I'll tell you something. The one thing I am afraid of is youth. Youth is rash and makes mistakes, but it dares to do the unexpected. In your position, yesterday, I would not have dared to draw that check. I would have been afraid

of the Federal court. I would have had to assign because I wouldn't take a crazy chance. I'm not going to lose money by making this deal with you. All your stocks will go sky high, even the coal mines and steel works. You've inspired confidence in the public by your demonstration this morning, and when the public gets the bit in its teeth nothing can stop it. I'll make enough profit out of the upward swing to pay you off and have a few millions left over. If you want to come in with me—"

"I don't, Mr. Eastingham. I'm going to get married and spend six months in Europe. After that I don't know what I shall do."

"I suppose you mean Miss Gregg, your secretary?"

"If she'll have me, I'll marry her; and I have hopes she will accept me."

Enoch sighed. "You would have made a good husband for my niece. She's a fine girl."

"Charming. Though it was pretty rotten to send her out with us as a spy."

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Eastingham indignantly. "My sister is ill in Chicago. She wired for Margaret. Of course, if you let anything drop on the trip and she just happened to prattle it to me—" The old rascal grinned craftily.

Bill roared. "I am delighted that Miss Eastingham was innocent. So you didn't know anything about the Lewton car?"

Enoch shook his head sadly. "Your father had a way of keeping his secrets. I hired that scoundrel Redding, hoping to find out just what Robinson was up to, but he was a damned double crosser."

"I'll tell you something," said Bill in a friendly spirit. "My friend Professor Smith is very much in love with your niece."

"He's bright, but it's impossible. No money."

"That's where you are wrong. I'm making over to him fifty per cent of my interest in Robinson and Company, because if it wasn't for his courage and good judgment, I'd be a dead man or a bankrupt."

"Say!" exclaimed Eastingham, "He'll be a multimillionaire."

"Certainly."

"Well, I won't tell Margaret," decided the clever old uncle. "Every time I introduce a rich man to her she doesn't like him. I was afraid she was interested in that crook Bates."

"I have a notion she likes Irving Smith."

"Well," declared Eastingham, "I wouldn't think of interfering with her wishes. Say, Robinson, with my brains and your courage—sure you won't reconsider?"

"I'm out of business," declared William Robinson.

"Too bad. Well, come out to dinner to-night. And bring the professor."

Bill laughed. "Another night. I have to have a private interview with Jane Gregg this evening, but—shall I send the professor?"

"Wait until to-morrow night and bring Miss Gregg and the professor. I expect that Margaret will be home to-morrow night."

Bill shook hands with his father's arch enemy, who had proved to be not such a bad old skate after all.

THE door opened and in came Smith.

"All arranged?" he demanded.

"Solomon," said Bill gravely, "you

may be a professor of business administration, but you don't know anything. I dictated terms of peace to Enoch. We are retiring from business with flying colors."

"Hum. Wonder if I can get my job back at Harvard."

His chief roared. "You don't know it, but you are an equal partner with me in Robinson and Company, and the Eastingham interests are going to pay you so much money for your stock that you can build your own university, big enough to make Harvard look like a grammar school."

Smith turned pale and his lip trembled.

"That's absurd!" he stammered. "I have done nothing—I was actually an obstruction."

"Don't forget Eureka Island. Of course you won't need this money because as the husband of Eastingham's heiress—"

"You must be crazy," he gasped unconsciously repeating Enoch's favorite expression.

"On the contrary. I've fixed it all up with Enoch. He's agreeable."

"What does her uncle matter? How could a girl like Margaret love me?"

"Hanged if I know, but I happened to see the look in her eye when she said good-by to you at Michigan City. Next time you see her, grab her, and kiss her, and that will be all that is necessary."

Smith grinned. "You think so. Well, let's see *you* try that. Miss Gregg is in her office."

"What? Ask her to come in."

Jane Gregg entered, hesitatingly. Bill rose and took a step toward her. He halted and looked uncertain.

"Go on. I dare you!" jeered Professor Smith.

Bill turned on him a furious look. "You get the heck out of here," he commanded. Smith vanished.

"Jane," said Bill gently. "What do you say if—if—if—"

"Yes," said Jane wonderingly.

"That's the right answer," declared Bill Robinson and he engulfed her in his arms.

THE END.

Handling Disorderly Bears

ONE of the problems that occasionally confront officials at some of our national parks is that of dealing with disorderly bears. On the whole, Bruin is unusually well behaved in the national parks. Once in a while a bear may tire of his regular diet and raid a camp larder. At Yellowstone, too curious tourists have been knocked flat when they failed to heed Bruin's warning grunt of "gangway." But such things are mere peccadilloes, and it is very seldom that bears have to be shot or confined for viciousness.

At Yosemite, bears that show evidence of bad temper are exiled to unused parts of the park. And since it is no joke to handle a full grown bear with a grouch, guile is resorted to. A large pipe, closed at one end, is placed near the bear. When he crawls inside to get the tidbit that has been put there, the open end is closed. Then the pipeful of bear is transported to Bruin's new home and he is released. It is said that bears seldom return to their former haunts after having been exiled.

Vincent B. Wilson.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Man," "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Gun-Runners," etc.

THE identity of Ralph Milne Farley is shrouded in mystery. When his first story, "The Radio Man," appeared in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly*, in 1924, it was announced editorially that the author was the world's leading authority in two lines, to name either of which would be instantly to reveal his identity.

"The Radio Man" attracted considerable attention and comment in literary and technical circles, and one newspaper, the Boston *Post*, even put one of its best sleuth-hounds on the trail. By careful study of the internal evidence in the story, especially the fact that the narrative started on Chappaquiddick Island, off the coast of Massachusetts, and that the hero was described as a member of the Harvard class of 1909, the *Post* narrowed the field to two Harvard '09 men who own estates on the island in question: namely, Dr. Francis M. Rackemann and former State Senator Roger Sherman Hoar. Dr. Rackemann is a recognized authority on hay-fever and eczema; whereas Senator Hoar has written the outstanding American texts on "Constitutional Conventions" and on "Ballistics."

Recently apropos Farley's "The Radio Flyers," the Boston *Post* announced that further evidence, namely a similarity between certain passages in one of Farley's stories and a whimsy entitled "Blue Dandelions," published years ago by Senator Hoar in the *Atlantic Monthly*, definitely establishes their identity. The *Post* ought to know, as Hoar used to work for them.

So we are accepting this verdict, and are publishing the portrait of the Senator.

Hon. Roger Sherman Hoar (alias Ralph Milne Farley), was born in Waltham, Massachusetts, on April 8, 1887. Until eight years ago he lived in Concord, Massachusetts.

He holds three degrees from Harvard University. In addition to his service in the State Senate, he has been Assistant Attorney General of Massachusetts, and Legal Advisor of the Constitutional Convention of 1917. He resigned that position to enlist as a private at the outbreak of the World War. Rapidly rising to captain, he served as senior instructor in military surveying at the Coast Artillery School, and later on the Technical Staff.

After the war, Bucyrus Company, of South Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the largest manufacturer of excavating machinery in America, was looking for a combined lawyer and engineer to take charge of their legal affairs, and persuaded Captain Hoar to resign his commission. He is now the attorney of their successor, Bucyrus-Erie Company. On the side, he is Lecturer in Physics at Marquette University, and a reserve major of the Technical Staff of the United States Army.

Major Hoar is the author of a number of works on law and engineering, and is a contributor to legal and technical magazines.

He is the inventor of several patented devices, including the north-finding apparatus used by his hero, *Eric Redmond*, in "The Radio Flyers." This is an actual practical instrument, useful in aiming big guns, the patent to which is owned by the War Department.

His chief interests, outside his official position, are his family, higher mathematics, blue dandelions and writing.

He is married, has a daughter and two sons, and lives in South Milwaukee.

Although each of his titles contains the word "Radio," he has never owned a radio set. No item of the technical background of any of his stories has ever been successfully challenged.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

DEFENDERS galore have been rallying to the standard of Ray Cummings lately. For example:

Norman, Okla.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for several years and have always got a great deal of pleasure from glancing over the "Argonotes." But not until this time have I ever participated in the discussions. I don't believe there is a magazine printed to-day that can vie with the ARGOSY to the quality and entertainment of the stories therein. I like especially the stories of Ray Cummings, whom I see is unjustly criticized by many. I like the stories of O. A. Kline, and have just finished reading "Maza of the Moon." I like detective stories of all kinds, especially Worts's *Gillian Hazeltine* novels. I like historical stories of all kinds; "Captain Nemesis," "He Rules Who Can," "The Plumed Serpent" and "Cyrano." I also like that master writer, Fred MacIsaac. In fact, I like all stories, especially those of science fiction, but please leave off the Westerns; their day is through.

FINIS GILLESPIE.

Asheville, N. C.

It seems that lately quite a few narrow-minded critics have taken the liberty in "Argonotes" to heap abuse upon the works of Ray Cummings. I am heartily in favor of Ollie N. Martin's view on the subject. If Mr. Andrews and the numerous other "kickers" don't like a certain story, let them pass it up. There are others who like it, no doubt, and anyway—what do you expect for a dime?

I may say that although I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY for only a little over six months, I am completely sold. I like the stories as they are—absolutely no change.

Your authors are fine! Ray Cummings, Fred MacIsaac, George F. Worts, Theodore Roscoe and Slater LaMaster are invincible. By the way, I am looking forward for a new LaMaster novel; one as fine as "The Phantom in the Rainbow."

"Backwater," by T. S. Stribling, starts splendidly, and "The Plumed Serpent" is fine. Theodore Roscoe's short stories are always appreciated, along with Thompson's.

A. G. JARRETT, JR.

THEODORE ROSCOE has been coming in for quite a bit of praise, also:

Raymond, N. H.

I have read ARGOSY for many years and it certainly gives me a laugh to see so many readers try to tell the authors how to write their stories. I think it little short of ridiculous and shows them sadly lacking in courtesy and extremely anxious to air their little bit of knowledge. Imagine telling Cummings and Wilstach how to do it—ha! ha!

To change the subject, I thought "The Ship of Ishtar" wonderful. Am waiting eagerly for another Merritt story. "The Hawk of Hazard" was great. Wirt's stories of *Jimmie Cordie* are a treat, and also Worts's stories of *Gillian Hazeltine*. Cummings's tales are all among the best; also those by Mason, Seltzer, Lawrence, Kline and Bedford-Jones.

I couldn't seem ever to get really interested in Farley's "Radio Planet" stories or in Richard Barry's stories until "The Plumed Serpent"; that is fine.

Tell Theodore Roscoe he writes wonderful stories, even though the readers hardly praise them enough.

E. M. BARTLETT.

Fulton, Ill.

I started reading the ARGOSY when it was a big sheet in the '70's, called *Golden Argosy*, and am still guilty at sixty-two years of age, old enough to know better. Never wanted to write to criticize or otherwise as some one story in an issue is worth the price of admission. But I just finished one of the best short stories I have ever read.

A writer who can say so much in so little, as the following passage quoted from Theodore Roscoe's story "Old Napoleon"—"A stray shell fragment had hirpeled through the church spire and beheaded the blue and gold virgin in her niche; I remember seeing the little doll-like head lying in the street, smiling painfully up at a sky bright with late afternoon sunshine"—deserves a bouquet!

JOHN M. SHEAR.

UNDERWORLD stories fill the bill with this one:

Winter Park, Fla.

I will confess I have not been reading the ARGOSY very long, but I find the habit growing on me. One of my sons read the magazine when he was in college and when I did not have time to read. Lately a young friend brought me several copies and I have enjoyed them so much.

I particularly like the war stories. I enjoyed, also, "The WH Brand" and "Run, Dan, Run!"

I have always been keenly interested in stories of the underworld. Why I cannot say. Perhaps some remote ancestor of mine may have been of the underworld. Let's hope not, however. But, nevertheless, these underworld stories have a particular appeal for me.

Certainly the ARGOSY has won a place in my list of magazines. So here's hoping this coming year may bring ARGOSY into more homes and that the magazine may be bigger and better.

G. SCROWBER.

JOHN SOLOMON is beginning to line up the fans:

Philadelphia, Pa.

Have been reading ARGOSY sporadically for some time. You have never heard from me—but I must say I am glad to hear of the return of *John Solomon*.

Those East of Suez stories, by Roscoe, are good. He has the gift of words, and is good at creating an atmosphere. "An Eye for An Eye" was very good, too.

JAMES MCDONALD.

THE short special features ring the bell with this reader:

St. Joseph, Mo.

I have no trouble to remember the *Golden Argosy* days, so consider myself an old-timer.

I am so sick of the impossible stories that I just had to write.

I have just finished "Maza of the Moon." I can only say one good thing for it. It was four parts and not six.

Let's have more stories like "Cyrano," "Run, Dan, Run!" and the new one this week, "A Great Man's Shoes," by MacIsaac. I know it will be great.

I also enjoy the short subjects under the heading Other Features. Those by Theodore Roscoe are not only interesting, but educational.

H. L. SAGE.

PLENTY more readers have been rallying to the defense of Ray Cummings. Here are a few:

St. Paul, Minn.

I have been an interested but silent reader of the ARGOSY for many years, but the way some of the readers have been throwing mud at Ray Cummings in the January 11 issue, just forces me to shove in my oar.

Ray Cummings is one of your best authors, and don't let some people that have no imagination tell you different. How about more stories from him? His "Princess of the Atom" and "The Snow Girl" were wonderful.

Worts is another fine author. Tell him to get busy on another *Gillian Hazeltine* story.

I like all your stories; keep the good old ARGOSY the way it is, and you'll have one satisfied reader.

My other favorite authors are F. V. W. Mason, Slater LaMaster, Fred MacIsaac, Lieutenant John Hopper, W. Wirt and last, but not least, Otis Adelbert Kline and Theodore Roscoe.

R. J. GREER.

Birmingham, Ala.

I have been a constant reader of ARGOSY and am against complainers who kick against authors. If Richard Andrews doesn't like Mr. Cummings's stories he doesn't have to read them. If people don't like an author's story let them try and do better. I like all of the authors of the ARGOSY, particularly J. Allan Dunn. Let us have some more Western and underworld stories.

ROY J. ALLISON.

Central City, Iowa.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for about five years and I certainly would hate to miss a copy.

Robert W. Lamb's letter aroused my ire as *Mme. Storey* tales and Ray Cummings's stories are my favorites. I think Cummings and Kline certainly have wonderful imaginations and I can hardly wait for the ARGOSY when one of their stories are in it.

I say let well enough alone and publish the ARGOSY now and forevermore as it is.

MRS. FRED CORNWELL.

Los Angeles, Cal.

I would not have written, but since I see that so many readers are kicking on Ray Cummings I felt that I should step in and take his part.

The first story I ever read in ARGOSY was "The Return of George Washington," which

came out about two years ago. I have been reading every story in it ever since. When I get the ARGOSY I turn to Ray Cummings's stories first, and, if there are none running, I turn to "Looking Ahead" to see if there will be one in the next issue.

I have only one objection to ARGOSY. That is that it only comes out once a week. I get the ARGOSY read in two days and have to wait all the rest of the week.

I like all of the stories in ARGOSY, but best of all are Ray Cummings's stories, so, Mr. Lamb, Mr. Sims and a few others, please remember when you go to kick about him that there are many others who like his stories.

Here's to long life to ARGOSY and Ray Cummings.

ORLAN FULLER.

THEODORE ROSCOE scores again:

Chicago, Ill.

I have just finished reading "An Eye for An Eye," and I consider this the best short story I ever read in a fiction magazine. Theodore Roscoe did a swell job on this one.

My favorite authors are W. Wirt, Theodore Roscoe, H. Bedford-Jones, Geo. F. Worts and particularly Fred MacIsaac.

WILLIAM B. SENNETT.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

2-22

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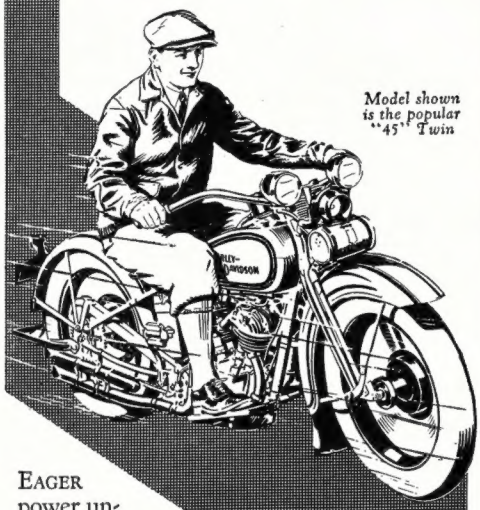

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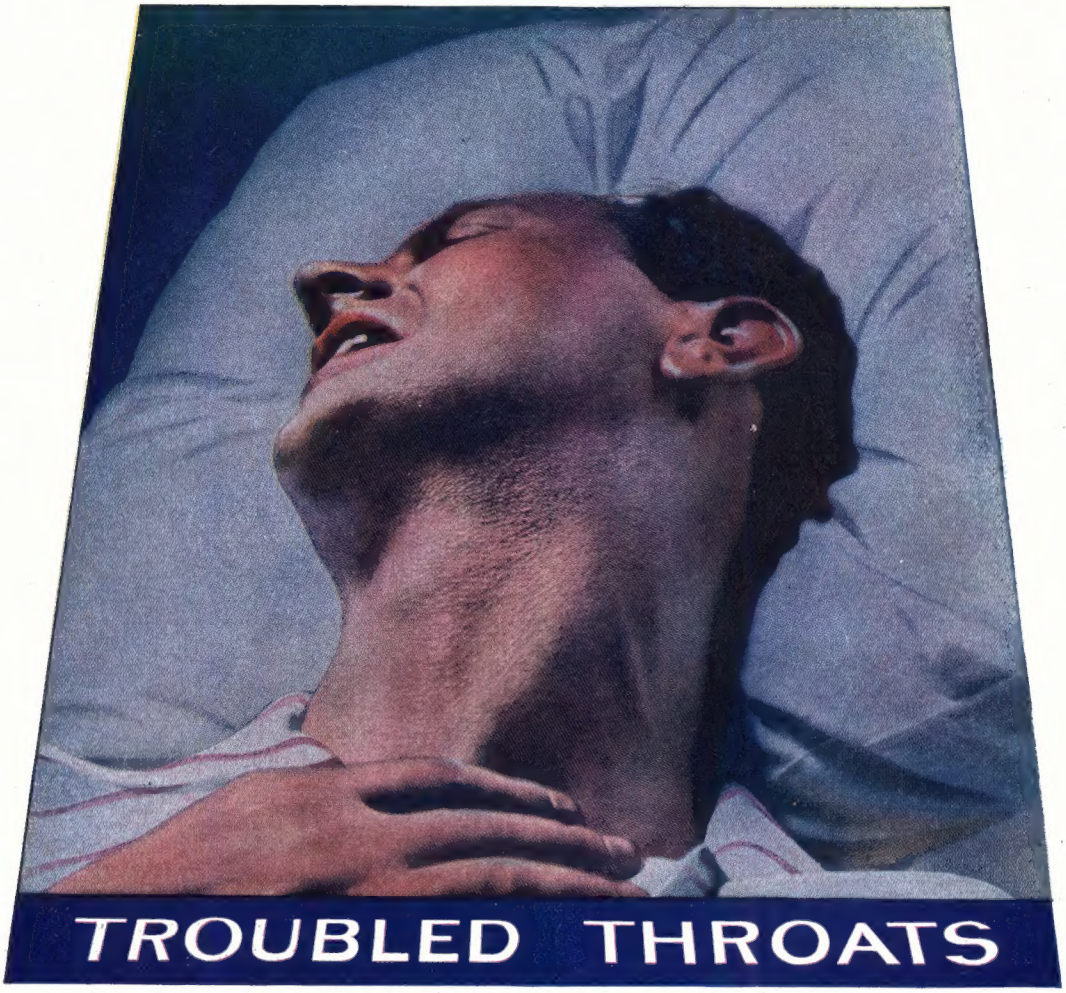

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